William Logan Rynerson in New Mexico, 1862–1893

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During the spring and summer of 1862 some two thousand California volunteers marched eight hundred miles across the Arizona desert to save New Mexico for the Union. They arrived in New Mexico too late to engage the rebels in active combat, and for the remainder of the Civil War the Californians were used to fight Indians and to guard against a possible Confederate invasion. When the war ended, many of the California Column (the name attached to the volunteers), elected to remain in New Mexico rather than retrace their steps to the Pacific Coast. Their subsequent careers in New Mexico were varied, but as individuals they played important roles, not only in the economic and political development of the territory but also in its cultural and intellectual development.¹

No historian has systematically studied the impact that these men had on New Mexico's history. Few of the Californians left personal papers and most are known only by their public activities recorded in local newspapers. William Logan Rynerson was one member of the California Column who became a leading citizen in southern New Mexico, but whose career for the most part has remained hidden in the pages of territorial newspapers. Although newspapers provide little information about Rynerson's personal life and were selective in the material they chose to print, it is still possible to reconstruct the basic elements of his career and to relate his activities to the growth of the territory in general. Rynerson is remembered today primarily for having shot and killed territorial Chief Justice John P. Slough and for his participation
in the famed Lincoln County War. For thirty-one years, however, Rynerson energetically pursued a many-faceted career in New Mexico as a miner, lawyer, politician, rancher, investor, and civic-minded citizen. He was not the biggest man in New Mexico in any one of these endeavors, but in southern New Mexico he at least equaled in stature the lawyer-politician, California Column veteran Albert Jennings Fountain, whose life story has been recorded by Arrell M. Gibson. Rynerson was only one of many individuals who shaped New Mexico’s history following the Civil War, but he embodied the restless, expansive, money-minded spirit that eventually modernized the territory and transformed the United States into an industrialized nation.

WILLIAM L. RYNERSON was born February 22, 1828, in Mercer County, Kentucky. He studied for some time at Franklin College, Indiana, but the excitement of the California gold strikes caused him to leave school and head west in 1852. His uncle, Christopher C. Rynerson, also of Mercer County, had journeyed to California in 1850 and undoubtedly helped his nephew acclimate himself to the heady atmosphere of the mining camps. On the West Coast, young Rynerson enlisted in Company C, First Regiment of the California Infantry, and in 1862 marched to New Mexico with the California Column. Mustered out of the service in Mesilla, November 1866, with the brevet rank of lieutenant colonel, Rynerson settled briefly in Mesilla before taking up residence in Las Cruces.

Prior to his discharge, Rynerson had already made certain investments in southern New Mexico which would assure his continued interest in that section of the territory. In addition to buying property in and adjacent to the town of Las Cruces, he joined John H. Stone, James H. Carleton (military commander of the Department of New Mexico), William R. McCormick, and Thomas H. Massie in locating a mining claim near the town of Pinos Altos in October 1866. Rynerson acquired interest in at least four other Pinos Altos claims, and during the summer of
1867 he brought from California a quartz mill to operate in the mining district. General Carleton purchased a one-fifth interest in the mill from Rynerson for three thousand dollars, but by July of the following year the Arizona Company had acquired the enterprise.4

The year following his discharge was eventful, for, in addition to his mining activities, the thirty-nine year old veteran began his active and influential role in territorial politics. In the fall of 1867 the voters of Doña Ana County elected the Republican Rynerson to the Council of the territorial legislature and reelected him to that post the following two years. Almost immediately Rynerson was involved in political intrigue and conflict. The Council convened December 2, 1867, with Rynerson, the only Anglo Senator, taking his seat as delegate from Doña Ana County. His right to that seat was disputed, however, and the Council refused to give Rynerson official recognition until the dispute was settled. John Lemon, the Doña Ana County probate judge, had issued the certificate of election to Samuel J. Jones, the Democratic candidate who had opposed Rynerson in the election. Later, after the votes had been recounted, Secretary of the Territory Herman H. Heath declared that Lemon’s certificate was fraudulent and subsequently issued a new certificate of election to Rynerson. Since the Secretary’s legal authority to decide election results was questioned, the Council conducted its own investigation, and on December 5 voted to seat Rynerson.5

Nonetheless, Rynerson was destined to miss most of the legislative meetings, because on Sunday, December 15, he was arrested and confined in the Fort Marcy guardhouse for the killing of Chief Justice John P. Slough, the Union colonel who had led Colorado troops in 1862 to expel the Confederates from New Mexico. As Chief Justice of New Mexico, Slough’s caustic language and aggressive tactics both on and off the bench had created numerous enemies. Probably intended as a rebuke of the Democratic Slough’s behavior, the Republican-dominated legislature in 1867 refused to follow tradition by having the Chief Justice administer the oaths of office and asked Secretary Heath
to perform the ceremonies. Judge Slough felt insulted and, blaming former Secretary William F. M. Arny for the legislature’s action, physically attacked Arny in what the Santa Fe New Mexican described as “a most brutal and cowardly manner.” The newspaper commented that this was merely another example of Judge Slough’s contemptible behavior.

Shortly thereafter Rynerson introduced resolutions in Council calling for the Chief Justice’s removal because of his unprofessional conduct. The Senator charged that Slough had in the past intimidated juries, made partisan decisions on the bench, and been frequently drunk in the streets of Santa Fe. Both houses of the legislature passed these resolutions on December 14. The Santa Fe Weekly Gazette, an organ for the local Democrats, later claimed that Rynerson was unacquainted with Slough and had been persuaded to enter these false and malicious charges by men outside the legislature. The two men confronted each other in La Fonda Hotel December 15, and after a short exchange of words, Rynerson shot and killed Judge Slough.

Rynerson was represented by former Chief Justice Kirby Benedict and Stephen B. Elkins, the United States District Attorney, at a preliminary hearing before Judge Joab Houghton on January 3, 1868. Samuel B. Wheelock, testifying for the defense, stated that on the night before the shooting Rynerson was playing billiards with Colonel Kinzie when Slough entered the billiard room and remarked to a neighbor that they were observing a strange combination, “a gentleman associating with a damned thief; I allude to that damned seven foot son of a bitch playing billiards with Col. Kinzie.” Slough went on to say that Rynerson was a thief and a coward who had stolen both in and out of the Army including his present seat in the legislature. Wheelock later repeated these slanders to Rynerson.

The day after Slough had made these remarks, Rynerson approached the Chief Justice in La Fonda demanding that Slough retract his statements. When Slough refused, Rynerson drew a gun and threatened to shoot unless Slough did as he asked.
Stephens, a witness to these proceedings, testified that Slough then turned as if to draw a gun, saying something like "Shoot, damn you!" Rynerson shot, and as Slough fell, a derringer clattered to the floor apparently from Slough's pocket. After hearing all the evidence, Judge Houghton remanded the prisoner to jail without setting bond. Several days later, Rynerson demanded a writ of habeas corpus, and on January 23, 1868, Judge Perry Brocchus released Rynerson on a twenty-thousand-dollar bond. Rynerson was eventually tried in March for Slough's murder and was acquitted by the jury on a plea of self defense.\(^9\)

Rynerson resumed his seat in the territorial legislature on January 24 and was appointed chairman of a special commission to investigate certain affairs. The commission's report severely criticized Governor Robert B. Mitchell who had replaced the appointees whom acting Governor Arny had named while Mitchell was out of the territory the previous winter. Rynerson's commission refused to confirm Mitchell's new appointments.\(^10\)

The adjournment of the legislature in late January may have given the harassed Governor some respite from his political foes, but the new legislature convening in December 1868 resumed the old hostilities. Once again the dispute focused on the Chief Justice. New Mexico was divided into three judicial districts with the Chief Justice handling affairs in the First Judicial District with headquarters at Santa Fe. Because political and economic interests were concentrated in the capital, the First was undoubtedly the most important of the three districts. John S. Watts, a former territorial delegate to Congress, had been appointed Chief Justice of New Mexico following Slough's death. To punish Watts for some fancied slights, the legislature passed an act reassigning Judge Watts to the isolated Third Judicial District which encompassed most of southern New Mexico. Reassigning obstreperous judges to less important districts as a means of limiting their influence was not uncommon in frontier politics, but neither was it uncommon for territorial governors to veto such acts. Governor Mitchell's veto saved Watts from exile, but his veto
message insulted the Santa Fe legislators. Consequently, Senator Rynerson introduced resolutions rebuking the Governor for his distasteful communication.\footnote{11}

Rynerson's own behavior in Santa Fe was closely watched by the Democrats in his home district. The latter were particularly displeased when Rynerson and Ignacio Orrantia, a Doña Ana County Republican and a representative to the legislature, failed to defeat an act which allowed the legislature to appoint a new probate judge in Doña Ana County after the incumbent, John Lemon, had resigned. Probate judges were elected by the citizenry, and the Democrats accused the legislature of taking a basic right from the people. Led by Democratic faithfule Thomas J. Bull, Daniel Frietz, and W. T. Jones, a group of citizens meeting in Mesilla passed formal resolutions in January 1869 condemning Orrantia and Rynerson for their acts of omission.\footnote{12}

Rynerson ended his career as Senator from Doña Ana in February 1870, and one of the final actions of the legislature that session was to confirm Governor William A. Pile's appointment of Colonel William L. Rynerson as Adjutant General of the territory. The Santa Fe Weekly New Mexican forthrightly stated that his appointment was "eminently satisfactory" to all Republicans. The newspaper went on to state that Rynerson's integrity and high character guaranteed honesty in the performance of that office.\footnote{13}

Shortly after the legislature adjourned, the people of the territory were electrified by news of a silver strike in the vicinity of present-day Lordsburg. In May 1870 Rynerson wrote the editor of the Weekly New Mexican that many Doña Ana County residents had left for the new mines and that he planned to join the rush in a few days. Although Rynerson filed a claim in the Ralston mining district, as the area was soon designated, his attention shifted to the silver discoveries made that same year in the Silver City area. The mining development at Ralston was slow, but spectacular finds near Silver City in Grant County produced the traditional rush of miners to the diggings.\footnote{14}

Silver City could claim only three bona fide houses in Sep-
September 1870, but by the following spring over eighty buildings had been erected. The Las Cruces Borderer announced in February 1872 that Silver City was the liveliest mining camp in the territory and predicted that within a year the Legal Tender, the Providencia, and the Red Rover mines of that area would be as famous as the Comstock in Nevada. A few months later Rynerson reported that Silver City had a population of a thousand and operated a school for the miner's children.

Occasionally Rynerson went on prospecting trips, but apparently his major interest was the mill he established to process silver ore coming from the mines. There were only four mills in operation by the summer of 1872, and although at least one remained in operation day and night, the mills could not process the ore as fast as the miners produced it. The two largest mills were owned by Martin W. Bremen and the Wisconsin Silver Mining Company. It was estimated that Bremen's mill, consisting of five stamps, extracted in one week silver valued at $2,122.00. During the same week, Rynerson's mill, consisting of three arrastras, extracted silver valued at $786.00.

One of the hazards faced by the miners was possible ambush by Apache raiders. John Bullard, one of the founders of Silver City, was killed in 1871 while chasing Apache who had raided the mining camps. The Borderer blamed the Gila Apache gathered at Cañada Alamosa for the raids and claimed that the reservation system in New Mexico was a failure. The editor suggested that if the government insisted on operating reservations that they be established in Boston or Philadelphia where Eastern do-gooders and Quakers could supervise the operation. Soon after Bullard's death, the miners at Silver City passed resolutions in good frontiersman tradition complaining that the federal government had failed to provide adequate protection against the Indians. They asked that the reservation system be abolished and that a recent Congressional appropriation of thirty thousand dollars for the Apache be used instead to outfit volunteer units to fight Indians. In addition, the miners appealed to all New Mexican residents to contribute to a fund to pay for Indian
scalps and to hire a scout who would remain permanently in the field hunting Apache.  

The citizens of Doña Ana County quickly responded to this appeal. Assembled at the county courthouse in Mesilla, the Doña Anans listened to fiery speeches by Colonel Rynerson, W. T. Jones, and others urging the citizens to unite to protect the territory against "the scalping knife and tomahawk of these ruthless barbarians." Resolutions were adopted asserting that the Cañada Alamosa reservation was used only to deposit old men, women, and children while the warriors raided the countryside. The residents of Doña Ana County then pledged themselves to support the miners in their war against the Apache and established a committee consisting of Rynerson, Ignacio Orrantia, and several other community leaders to solicit contributions to support a full-time scout as suggested by the miners.  

This was not the first occasion that Rynerson had denounced the Indians at Cañada Alamosa. He had written Governor Pile in November 1869, requesting that additional troops be sent after hostile Apache who were leaving that area and raiding the settlements. The Apache agent, Charles E. Drew, in turn implied that Rynerson had ulterior motives in making these charges, since the latter was post trader at Fort Bayard and more troops meant increased business. But the citizens of Mesilla, Pinos Altos, and Mimbres passed resolutions supporting Rynerson and condemning the reservation system.  

Rynerson deserted the mining camps at Silver City for several months in 1871 to take part in a particularly bitter election contest in Doña Ana County. At the Republican County Convention in June, Rynerson, Orrantia, Jacob Applezoler, Juan José Durán, and Perfecto Armijo formed a committee to nominate the local Republican ticket. For the top offices, they proposed John Lemon for probate judge, Perfecto Armijo for sheriff, and former California Column man John S. Crouch for senator. Rynerson closed the convention with a speech urging all Republicans to work for the success of the party. Newspaper descriptions of Rynerson give the impression that he was a stern, somewhat remote individual, but
he was not devoid of all humor. At the end of the meeting, Ryner­son brought a trained pet into the convention hall to entertain his fellow Republicans. The *Borderer*, a Democratic newspaper, rather enjoyed reporting that the little creature instead of performing tricks had made wild noises, thumped the table, and attacked various members of the convention. 21

Both political parties staged a number of rallies during the course of the campaign. One of the early Democratic mass meetings drew six hundred people from the surrounding area to the small plaza at Mesilla. A *Borderer* correspondent described certain rather amusing tactics used by local Democrats to under­mine Republican operations. Having learned that the Republicans had planned an electioneering trip to the small settlements south of Mesilla, several Democrats gathered at Mesilla intending to follow the Republicans and address the crowds after their op­ponents had finished their speeches. The Republicans, however, failed to appear at the designated hour of departure. Sensing Republican trickery, the Democrats departed; but after riding only a short distance from town, they speedily returned to the plaza where they now found Colonel Rynerson standing in front of the post office with flag in hand apparently awaiting his fellow Republicans. When no one came to join Rynerson, the Democrats themselves left for the southern communities, and instead of trailing the Republicans, they led the electioneering bandwagon. The Democrats staged public meetings in La Mesa, Chamberino, and La Union and offered to debate with the Republicans when they arrived in these settlements. The Republicans refused because Rynerson felt that the two parties should be kept apart. Although the Democrats had drawn enthusiastic crowds, the Republicans made no effort to reassemble area residents en masse, perhaps not wanting to appear in their opponents’ shadows. 22

The campaign was characterized by the usual charges and counter-charges of graft and corruption. The most serious accusa­tions were made against Rynerson and his fellow Republicans by the incumbent probate judge, Pablo Melendres. In an open letter to the people of Doña Ana County, Melendres claimed that
Ignacio Orrantia, clerk of the probate court, had asked Melendres to switch parties and join the Republicans. In addition Orrantia requested that Melendres allow him to perform the duties of probate judge for six days following the election so that he could assure a Republican victory. In return for these favors, Melendres was offered Colonel Rynerson's federal office as customs inspector which paid one hundred twenty-five dollars a month. According to Melendres, Orrantia then stated that the Republicans were determined to win the election "whether they gained it by votes or the use of bullets, clubs, rocks or blows."23 Several days later when unidentified gunmen fired at Manuel Barela, brother of the Democratic candidate for sheriff, and Ylario Moreno, son of a Democratic candidate for the legislature, the Borderer unhesitantly announced that the Republican threat of violence had turned into attempted assassination.24

Rynerson's activities on behalf of the Republicans continued to draw criticism from the Borderer, but the press failed to mention Rynerson in connection with the tragic finale of this campaign. Each party held a political meeting in Mesilla on August 27, with José Manuel Gallegos, the Democratic nominee for territorial delegate, on hand to boost Democratic loyalty. Rynerson was probably the leading orator at the Republican conclave.25 After the speechmaking had ended, the two parties staged separate parades through town, eventually meeting at the plaza. Emotions were high, there had been considerable talk of violence, and when Apolonio Barela fired his gun in the air, indiscriminate shooting followed. Nine men were killed and an estimated forty or fifty were wounded in what became known as the Mesilla Riot. Among the dead was John Lemon whose skull had been fractured by a pickax wielded by Isaac N. Kelly, a former printer for the Borderer, who was himself killed in the fracas.26 The Republicans were defeated in the September elections, not only in Doña Ana County, but throughout the territory. The Republican vote for territorial delegate had been split between J. Francisco Chaves, the regular party candidate, and José D. Sena, who had bolted the party and was running as an independent. Gallegos consequently
achieved a relatively easy victory. With Lemon's death, Ryner­son's name was placed on the ballot as Republican candidate for probate judge. He was defeated along with the other Republic­ans, but the most significant effect of the Mesilla Riot on Rynerson's life lay in the future. On a Sunday evening in December 1872 Rynerson married Luciana Lemon, the widow of the unfortunate John Lemon.27

After his defeat Rynerson returned to the mining camps. By mid-July 1872 he had rented his mill for one hundred dollars a week and thereafter devoted considerable attention to legal affairs. The colonel had been admitted to the New Mexico bar in 1870, but no reports of his legal activities ap­peared in the local newspapers until the summer of 1872.28 In August of that year, Rynerson joined fellow lawyers Thomas B. Catron and John D. Bail in representing Martin W. Bremen, owner of the Seneca mine at Silver City, in a lawsuit against Sidney Webb, George Arnold, and Frank Wilburn, proprietors of the neighboring Dexter mine. Claiming title to the latter, Bremen had secured an injunction prohibiting further work in the mine until its title could be validated. Public interest in the case was high, and observers believed that the court's decision would establish an important precedent. Later that year, Judge Warren Bristol threw out Bremen's claim to the entire mine, limiting the area in dispute to a small strip of land lying between the two mines. Rynerson and his partners had in essence lost the case, and eventually in November 1873 the parties agreed that "the cause be dismissed at the cost of the defendants." It is perhaps ironic that when the Dexter mine resumed work, the mine owners engaged the Rynerson mill to process the ore.29

Nearly two years elapsed before Rynerson was involved in another case which excited widespread public interest. It was an important and unusual suit because it challenged the legality of the Mesilla Land Grant and because Rynerson appeared as his own attorney in an attempt to establish ownership to a portion of it. Congress had established the office of surveyor general in 1854 to investigate the validity of lands granted to individuals and
communities by the Spanish and Mexican governments prior to American occupation of the Southwest. These investigations were often lengthy affairs, complicated by grasping lawyers who found lucrative practices in helping clients establish title to their lands. The Mexican government had granted some two leagues of land to the town of Mesilla to be used for pasture and woodlands. This grant was still unconfirmed in 1874, although the surveyor general, James K. Proudfit, had investigated the claim and had forwarded a favorable report to Washington.

Like other territorial lawyers, Rynerson saw an opportunity for personal gain in the confusion surrounding land titles. In February 1874 he entered the Mesilla land and staked out one hundred sixty acres as a pre-emptor, declaring that the grant itself had been defective. Several days later the enraged residents of Mesilla physically ejected Rynerson when he refused to vacate their land. Rynerson then entered a suit in district court to establish his title to the land and to collect damages from his assailants.

Before the case was tried, however, the Mesilla News announced that Lawrence Lapoint, a local Republican, had been appointed register and Rynerson receiver of the new land office to be established in Mesilla. The newspaper favored these appointments and implied that Stephen B. Elkins, New Mexico's delegate to Congress, had secured them for the local Republicans. It is interesting to speculate about the political implications of Rynerson's appointment. Elkins and his law partner, Thomas B. Catron, formed the nucleus of a Republican-dominated group of lawyers, judges, politicians, and businessmen who were known as the Santa Fe Ring. Their major aims were to control politics and make money, the latter primarily through land grant litigation. Similar rings emerged in the 1870's and the 1880's in other frontier territories and all reflected the general materialistic and monopolistic characteristics of post-war American society. Rynerson's political opponents at various times charged that he was a member of the Ring, but the Colonel denied all connections with the Santa Fe coterie. Despite this denial, various links between Rynerson and members of the Ring warrant his
inclusion at least within its rear guard. Elkins was obviously rewarding Rynerson for faithful support, yet Elkins may have been unaware of Rynerson's impending litigation. Since Rynerson never assumed the duties of land receiver, his appointment may have been rescinded once it became apparent a conflict of interest was involved.

Rynerson's suit against the citizens of Mesilla was tried in Grant County in December 1874. Acting as his own attorney, he testified that he had entered upon the disputed land on February 15 and that after making improvements and residing on the claim for twenty days, he had been ejected by the defendants. He claimed to have suffered damages of between two and three thousand dollars and demanded clear title to the land in addition to damages. The defendants were represented by attorney Albert J. Fountain who, according to the Mesilla News, presented a brilliant case for the defense. It took the jury ten minutes to render a verdict in favor of the defense. The Mesillans were jubilant because their lands had been saved, but Rynerson had lost another important legal case.

Rynerson's legal career took on a new dimension in January 1876, when Governor Samuel B. Axtell appointed him district attorney for the Third Judicial District, encompassing Doña Ana, Lincoln, and Grant counties. Reappointed by Axtell in 1878, Rynerson played an official but partisan role in the so-called Lincoln County War. Essentially this was a struggle between two opposing factions each wanting to dominate the political and economic life of the county. Lawrence G. Murphy, James J. Dolan, and John H. Riley formed the nucleus of one faction, while Alexander A. McSween, John H. Tunstall, and John S. Chisum composed the other. In 1875 Murphy owned the only store in Lincoln County and consequently controlled business in the area. Although a Democrat, Murphy seems to have had amiable business relations both with Governor Axtell and Thomas Catron, who was United States attorney at the time. Ill health caused Murphy to take Dolan and Riley into the firm as partners, and by the time the violence had reached its peak, Murphy had
withdrawn completely from the company and was in Santa Fe seeking medical treatment.

McSween and Tunstall were both newcomers to the county, having arrived in 1875 and 1876 respectively. Tunstall entered the cattle business while McSween concentrated on building a law practice; together they established a store which they hoped would break Murphy's economic hold on the county. Chisum's role was primarily that of friend and counselor to McSween and Tunstall.

The dispute that led to open violence concerned the collection of an insurance policy which McSween had been hired to process. When he failed to turn the money over to the heirs, he was charged with embezzlement and his property was attached by the courts to satisfy claims on the policy. McSween believed that Dolan and Riley had masterminded these proceedings in an attempt to drive him and Tunstall out of business. An unsigned notice soon appeared in Lincoln County accusing Catron, Rynerson, and Sheriff William Brady of conspiring with Dolan and Riley in their plot to crush all economic competition. 38 Rynerson, indeed, had a personal as well as professional interest in the case. When Judge Bristol issued the attachment papers he required the heirs who were initiating the suit against McSween to furnish a sixteen-hundred-dollar attachment bond. James J. Dolan and Rynerson signed these bonds as sureties. Shortly thereafter Rynerson wrote a friendly letter to Dolan and Riley expressing his views on Tunstall and McSween, whom he believed held the missing insurance money. He told Dolan and Riley that the "McSween outfit" ought to be shaken up until "it shells out and squares up" and then should be driven from the territory. Rynerson concluded by stating: "I shall help you all I can for I believe there was never found a more scoundrelly set than that outfit." 39

Since Tunstall was McSween's partner, a posse attempted to attach his property also, but in the process of serving papers on Tunstall, the posse shot and killed the young rancher. In retaliation, men said to be working for McSween killed Sheriff Brady, his deputy, and three members of the posse who had served the
papers. On the recommendation of Colonel Rynerson, Governor Axtell subsequently appointed George Peppin, a California Column veteran, as the new sheriff of Lincoln County.\(^{40}\) Sheriff Peppin attempted to round up the McSween gang in July 1878, but McSween and his friends refused to surrender, being convinced that they could not find justice in the courts. On the night of July 19 McSween and three of his supporters were killed in a violent showdown with Peppin.

With McSween's death, the Lincoln County War reached a turning point. Violence in the county did not immediately end, but the trouble slowly abated since many of the principals involved were either dead or were turning their interests elsewhere. Rynerson continued as district attorney, prosecuting a number of cases resulting from the Lincoln County violence until his term of office ended in 1880. His role in the war had been that of a public official who aided and supported one of the interested parties. By undermining faith in the courts, Rynerson's partisan behavior contributed to the breakdown in law and order.

During the 1870's, the local press frequently recorded Rynerson's participation in civic affairs as well as his attendance at court. Among other activities, Rynerson helped organize Fourth of July celebrations, boost federal aid for railroad construction, and bring together the California Column veterans for a reunion. Many of these former soldiers, including Rynerson, were active members of the Aztec Lodge of Ancient Free and Accepted Masons, established in Las Cruces in 1866. Rynerson served as secretary of the lodge in 1875; two years later, when delegates from the territory's three lodges formed a Grand Lodge of New Mexico, Rynerson was installed as Deputy Grand Master.\(^{41}\)

By the end of the decade Rynerson and Albert J. Fountain were among Mesilla Valley's most distinguished citizens and each had given lengthy service to the Republican party. The two men had occasionally opposed each other in the courts; often they had worked together in social and civic affairs. During the violent months of the Lincoln County War, however, a rift developed between the two men. Fountain's newspaper, the *Mesilla Valley*
Independent, criticized the local courts for failing to maintain order in Lincoln County. Rynerson was undoubtedly offended by such criticism since he interpreted attacks on the judicial system as personal assaults on his integrity. The rift deepened when Fountain temporarily deserted to the Democrats in the fall of 1878. Fountain was elected president of the so-called Law and Order party, which endorsed the territorial Democratic platform and Benito Baca, the Democratic candidate for delegate. Rynerson was appointed to the Territorial Central Republican Committee in 1878, and as the leading county Republican, he staunchly supported Mariano S. Otero, the Republican nominee for delegate. When Otero campaigned in southern New Mexico, Rynerson and other area Republicans staged a mass demonstration for his benefit. 42

The Republicans won the local election, and initially it appeared that the Doña Ana County voters had cast the majority of their votes for Otero. After Fountain and his fellow Law and Order cohorts demanded a recount, however, the board of commissioners ruled that Baca had received a margin of thirty-four votes in the county. In December 1878 Simeon H. Newman, a former school teacher and a Law and Order man, launched the newspaper Thirty-Four, its name being derived from the thirty-four vote plurality polled by the local Democrats. 43

The following year the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad entered New Mexico, marking a new era in the territory's history. Of major importance to New Mexican residents was the joining of that railroad with the Southern Pacific at Deming in 1881. With the coming of the railroads, property values rose, mining and cattle enterprises expanded, towns were modernized, and the territory prospered. Mesilla Valley shared in this prosperity, and Rynerson and other like-minded capitalists took advantage of the new opportunities to increase their personal gain. 44

Land had apparently always interested Rynerson, and by the late 1870's he had acquired at least one ranch of one hundred sixty acres located between Las Cruces and Mesilla. By 1884 he had acquired a smaller ranch of about sixty acres in the same
vicinity and had constructed a mile-long private acequia to the larger of the properties, where he had planted around one hundred apple trees. Alfalfa, corn, and cabbages were raised on the smaller ranch. On part of his acreage he raised hogs, and the local press claimed that Rynerson was "probably more extensively engaged in the hog business than any man west of the Mississippi." In addition to his ranches, Rynerson owned a beautiful Las Cruces residence, whose pleasant atmosphere was described in the *Mesilla News*. As a rancher, Rynerson was among the first in Mesilla Valley to employ new equipment; in 1878 he invested in a corn planter and three years later he was using a hay bailing machine to prepare his alfalfa for market. The press praised Rynerson's efforts since the use of new machines showed progress.\(^4^5\)

In addition to his Mesilla Valley property, Rynerson began investing in the Lincoln County cattle industry in the early 1880's. By the summer of 1884, he was associated with John H. Riley in the Membrillo cattle ranch and had joined Numa Raymond, James J. Dolan, and John Lemon in establishing a ranch of some twelve to fifteen hundred head of cattle on the Rio Felix. Occasionally Rynerson made trips to the East to purchase purebred bulls for his own and neighboring ranches.\(^4^6\)

As the cattle industry expanded, rustlers moved into the area to share in the prosperity. To protect themselves, the principal stockowners of Mesilla Valley organized the Doña Ana County Stock Association on March 31, 1883. George Lynch was elected president, A. J. Fountain, vice-president, John H. Riley, secretary, and Evangelisto Chavez, treasurer. Fountain, Rynerson, and B. E. Davies were appointed to draft bylaws for the organization. Since militia troops under Fountain had aided local authorities in suppressing the rustlers, the Association singled out Fountain for special praise. He was later retained by the stockmen to assist in prosecuting individuals accused of stealing cattle from members of the organization. In February 1884 Rynerson, Riley, and Davies were selected to attend a Santa Fe meeting of delegates from all New Mexico's stock associations. A territorial stock-
growers association was established at this meeting in March, with Joseph W. Dwyer as president, Rynerson as vice-president, and Max Frost, a prominent member of the Santa Fe Ring, as secretary.47

Cattle was apparently Rynerson's major economic interest in the 80's, but he also invested in mining in the Organ Mountains near Las Cruces. New discoveries of gold, silver, and copper in 1876 had sent area residents scurrying to the hills. The Mesilla News reported that "merchants, farmers, miners, mechanics and professional men may be seen getting everything from a pick to a horn spoon and starting from Mesilla and Cruces to the mines about 28 miles distant."48 By mid-1881 Rynerson and his brother, J. H. Rynerson, jointly owned the Modoc silver mine located on the western slope of the Organs. It was incorporated the following year as the Modoc Mining and Reduction Company, with John A. Miller, W. L. Rynerson, and J. H. Rynerson listed as incorporators and directors. Although the Rio Grande Republican predicted a lucrative future for the Modoc, there is no evidence that the mine substantially increased the wealth of the Rynerson brothers.49

As a sharp-minded businessman, Rynerson worked with town boosters to establish Las Cruces as the political and economic center of southern New Mexico. To secure the railroad depot for Las Cruces, Rynerson and his friends purchased town land, subsequently deeding it to the railroad and its subagency, the New Mexico Town Company. Rynerson's share of the purchase money was one thousand dollars. Rynerson and Judge Simon B. Newcomb, in addition, persuaded the territorial legislature in January 1882 to change the county seat from Mesilla to Las Cruces. This action incensed Mesilla residents, and their spokesman, the Mesilla News, attempted to discredit Rynerson, claiming that he owned the land where the new courthouse would be located. Rynerson denied this charge; the land in question, he said, had been deeded to the county by the New Mexico Town Company. Although Rynerson was the local land agent for the
company, he denied owning any stock in it or benefiting financially from the relocation of the county seat.\footnote{50}

The courthouse controversy transformed the 1882 local elections into a political war between Las Cruces and Mesilla. Judge Warren Bristol, presiding judge of the Third Judicial District and a Mesilla resident, issued an injunction restraining county commissioners from issuing bonds to build a jail and courthouse at the new county seat. As a fellow Mesilla resident, Fountain supported Bristol and exchanged insults with Rynerson in the pages of the local press.\footnote{51} Rynerson, Martin Amador, Pablo Melendres, and other area residents nominated a bipartisan People's Ticket for the November elections, but the town of Mesilla supported opposing candidates. When the People's Party won at the polls, the courthouse controversy ended, and in February 1883 the county commissioners began receiving bids for the construction of the new jail and courthouse.\footnote{52}

Shortly thereafter Rynerson and Fountain ended their feud, possibly as a result of their mutual interest in the cattlemen's association. In 1884 they joined forces to challenge the political power of the Santa Fe politicos. At a spring meeting of county residents, Rynerson, Newcomb, and Fountain denounced "the infamous legislature" at Santa Fe for enacting certain bills which benefited only the capital city and burdened the people with unfair taxes. Speaking to the assembled citizens, Rynerson listed the unfair actions of the legislature: It had voted $200,000 for capitol buildings, $150,000 for a penitentiary, $5,000 for a Catholic school in Santa Fe, and a large sum to construct a hospital in the capital. Fountain, Rynerson, Numa Reymond, Nestor Armijo, and Pablo Melendres, all local boosters, were appointed to draft a memorial to Congress asking for an annulment of all acts passed by the territorial legislature.\footnote{53}

In May Rynerson, Fountain, Riley, and five other county representatives attended a Republican meeting in Santa Fe to select two delegates to attend the Chicago National Republican Convention. William H. H. Llewellyn of Lincoln, Eugenio
Romero of Las Vegas, and William Breeden, the territorial Republican chairman from Santa Fe, were nominated. Breeden's failure to be elected presaged a serious rift in New Mexico's Republican party. According to the *Albuquerque Morning Journal*, Breeden had been defeated because he was too closely associated with the Santa Fe Ring. 54

As Republican leaders made plans for the coming November elections, several men were mentioned as possible Republican nominees for territorial delegate to Congress: Mariano S. Otero, William L. Rynerson, L. Bradford Prince, Thomas B. Catron, William Breeden, J. Francisco Chavez, and Lorenzo Lopez. This list was eventually narrowed to Prince and Rynerson with Prince being the first to announce his candidacy. In midsummer Prince wrote to Rynerson asking him to state his intentions in the coming election. When Rynerson refused to commit himself, Prince wrote nearly identical letters to Llewellyn, Riley, Newcomb, and Fountain asking for their support if Rynerson failed to run. 55

Fountain formally announced Rynerson's candidacy for the Republican nomination in an August meeting of the Doña Ana County Republicans. In addressing the meeting, Fountain declared that "we come here to nominate the man who in my opinion will be elected our next delegate to Congress. The time has arrived when we should select a strong candidate to represent southern New Mexico in Congress." 56 When the Republican convention convened in Santa Fe later that month, the delegates were almost equally divided into Prince and Rynerson supporters. Since San Miguel County had sent two sets of delegates, one supporting Rynerson and the other simply described by the press as a fraudulent mob, a motion was made to exclude the two delegations from voting during the temporary organization of the convention. The Rynerson faction attempted to defeat this resolution because they needed the San Miguel votes to maintain their strength during the period when the chairman and the credentials committee were selected. When their attempt failed, Rynerson's supporters walked out of the convention, leaving the regular
Republicans to nominate Prince, and meeting that evening to nominate Rynerson as an Independent Republican candidate for Congress. In accepting his nomination, Rynerson declared his sympathy for the efforts of his supporters "to drive from political power the combination of men known as the Santa Fe Ring." 57

Rynerson's supporters canvassed the territory during September, trying to establish his image as a candidate free of all Ring connections. Breeden, however, addressed an open letter to the Republicans of southern New Mexico asserting that Rynerson had been in New Mexico politics for seventeen years and during that time he has never asked the Republicans of Santa Fe or the men known as the Santa Fe ring for any service or assistance that was not freely rendered him. They have done or tried to do everything that Col. Rynerson has ever desired to have done. 58

It is interesting to note that Mesilla residents were apparently willing to forget Rynerson's previous attempt to annex one hundred sixty acres of their land. Jesus M. G. Armijo, addressing a mass meeting in Mesilla Valley, now urged the Mexican people to vote for Rynerson because he would press for the settlement of disputed land titles. 59

Prince's supporters condemned Rynerson for bolting the party, but they saw little chance for Prince to win the election. Indeed, the split in the Republican ranks allowed the Democrats to elect Antônio Joseph as New Mexico's delegate to Congress. Following the election, Rynerson dutifully thanked his supporters, implied that the anti-ring faction would eventually triumph, and then traveled east with other New Mexico stockmen to attend a cattlemen's convention in St. Louis. 60

The first half of the 1880's had been active years for Colonel Rynerson. In addition to his activities as rancher, miner, politician, and town booster, Rynerson maintained a busy law practice, served as a director of the Las Cruces Publishing Company (publishers of the Rio Grande Republican), and for a short time commanded the 1st Regiment of the Territorial Militia. He also
attended territorial Masonic functions, chaperoned dances organized by the young people of Las Cruces, and served as a county school commissioner.  

Rynerson was fifty-six years old at the time of his defeat in the 1884 election. Five years later he suffered a stroke which partially paralyzed the right side of his face, and although he apparently never regained his former health, he maintained an active life until his death in 1893. His involvement in politics, law, ranching, and civic affairs continued during the last nine years of his life. In the political arena, he supported Republican efforts to reunite the party after the 1884 debacle, attended the usual county and territorial political conventions, and served as New Mexico's representative on the Republican National Committee in the early 90's.  

Among Rynerson's more important political contributions were his efforts on behalf of New Mexican statehood. In September 1889 he attended the controversial Santa Fe Constitutional Convention where he served as chairman of the committee on public institutions and buildings. Although New Mexico's bid for statehood had been rejected by Congress earlier in the year, territorial leaders believed that the convention would underscore the people's determination to fight for statehood. Early the following year, while visiting Washington, Rynerson judged that prospects for achieving admission were favorable, and in two significant letters, one to Catron and the other to Max Frost, editor of the Santa Fe New Mexican, Rynerson urged that the leading citizens of the territory descend upon the capital city to lobby for statehood. Governor L. Bradford Prince subsequently appointed fifty-four New Mexicans to the Congressional delegation, twenty-nine of whom eventually traveled to Washington.  

Rynerson's financial investments in the 1880's largely reflected the economic interests of other New Mexican investors. In addition to his cattle interests, Rynerson entered a claim under the Desert Land Act of 1883, his entry being among the one hundred seventy-five Desert Land entries made in New Mexico that year. His land was located on both sides of the Tularosa River (a small
MILLER: WILLIAM LOGAN RYNERSON

stream) in what was known as the Tularosa Canyon. His entry was contested the following year, however, by Henry C. Brown, William S. Lewis, and Almira Tucker, who claimed that the land had been farmed without irrigation for the previous twelve years and could not be classified as desert land. In subsequent investigations, land office officials noted that trouble had developed over Tularosa River water rights since there was not sufficient water in the stream to irrigate land and to supply water to the town of Tularosa at the mouth of the canyon. Concluding its investigation, the land office decided in favor of Rynerson, stating that the land in question could not support agriculture without irrigation. Shortly thereafter, Rynerson constructed a large ditch and several reservoirs to provide irrigation for his future alfalfa fields. 65

Several irrigation projects were initiated in New Mexico in the late 1880's. One of the schemes proposed by southern New Mexicans called for the construction of a great canal two hundred miles long to irrigate the Jornada del Muerto. Water would be diverted from the Rio Grande some place north of the Jornada and then carried in a great ditch over the mesa on the east side of the river to a point just below El Paso where the water would be returned to the river bed. The main booster of the project was John B. Bowman, a long-time resident on the Jornada, but Rynerson, Reymond, and other interested individuals formed the Jornada and El Paso Reservoir and Canal Company, pledging one hundred dollars each to defray expenses in launching the project. Bowman was sent east to lobby for government aid. 66 Railroad building was also a favorite topic for discussion among territorial capitalists in the 1880's. While the Big Ditch plans were being formulated, Rynerson joined Reymond, Bowman, Martin Lohman, and Frank W. Smith as incorporators in the Mesilla Valley, White Oaks and Eastern Railroad Company. Although never developed, the proposed line was to run some four hundred miles from the Rio Grande in Doña Ana County to a point on the Canadian River near the Texas border. 67

In addition to irrigation and transportation schemes, New Mexican capitalists continued to invest in cattle in the late 80's, although
the national cattle industry was experiencing a severe depression. Rynerson, John H. Riley, and Pantaleon Sandoval had become partners in a cattle venture in 1885, with Thomas B. Catron joining and Sandoval leaving the partnership in December 1889. In the following spring, Rynerson, Riley, Catron, Albert L. Christy, and Henry J. Cuniffe incorporated the venture as the Tularosa Land and Cattle Company, with ranges located on the west side of the Mescalero Indian Reservation and capital stock listed as $250,000. When Rynerson died, his share in the company was acquired by Riley and Catron. 68

Of major concern to the stockmen in the 80's was an outbreak of Texas fever which threatened to decimate the New Mexican herds. The territorial legislature passed a quarantine law in 1884 giving the governor authority to proclaim or end a quarantine on diseased cattle. Governor Lionel A. Sheldon declared in March 1885 that the quarantine act was in full force, making it unlawful to bring cattle into New Mexico that were diseased or had been exposed to contagious diseases. John H. Riley was appointed cattle inspector in southern New Mexico, but Colonel Rynerson served as his deputy when Riley was absent from the territory. 69

An important legal case involving cattle and Texas fever was tried in Las Cruces in late March 1886. Rynerson, Fountain, Newcomb, and E. C. Wade, a law partner of Rynerson, represented the Lynch Brothers Cattle Company in a suit against the Grayson Cattle Company for losses suffered when the latter introduced diseased cattle onto the Lynch Brothers' range. The plaintiffs claimed damages of twenty thousand dollars. The defendants were represented by Catron, his law partner William T. Thornton, and three other attorneys. Rynerson provided an element of courtroom drama by introducing the Bible to prove that Texas fever had existed since the time of the Israelites. The colonel blamed the children of Israel for taking the disease with them when they journeyed into Egypt. The Egyptian herds became infected and "died in great numbers, while the cattle of the Israelites, being inoculated with distemper, did not suffer from it." The case was decided in favor of the Lynch Brothers, but despite
Rynerson's colorful appeal they received damages of only $5,200 plus interest and court costs.\textsuperscript{70}

As rancher, lawyer, and investor, Rynerson's energies centered on the cattle industry, but as city booster and responsible citizen, he devoted increasing attention in the remaining years of his life to the improvement of education in southern New Mexico. He and six other progressive Las Cruznas met on April 26, 1888, to discuss education in the local community. It was decided at this and later meetings to establish a college in Las Cruces that would hopefully rival educational institutions in the East. Plans progressed rapidly, and on September 17, 1888, Las Cruces College opened with Hiram Hadley, a Quaker educator from Indiana, as president of the school. “College” was perhaps a misnomer, since the institution was limited to elementary and college preparatory classes.\textsuperscript{71}

The following year when the territorial legislature authorized the establishing of an agricultural land grant college, residents of Las Cruces appointed William L. Rynerson, John H. Riley, Numa Reymond, and nine others to lobby in Santa Fe to locate the college in their town. Albert J. Fountain, as territorial Speaker of the House, played a key role in marshaling support for the bill, enacted February 28, 1889, locating the school in the southern New Mexico community. In September Governor L. Bradford Prince appointed Rynerson, together with fellow Las Cruznas, John R. McFie and Numa Reymond, Robert Black of Silver City, and Jayno A. Whitmore of San Marcial, to the school's first Board of Regents. Rynerson served on the Board as secretary-treasurer until his death on September 26, 1893.\textsuperscript{72}

William L. Rynerson, who entered New Mexico in 1862 as a California Volunteer, became one of southern New Mexico's outstanding political and civic leaders. He exhibited a certain degree of civic responsibility, often serving on committees to benefit the community and add enjoyment to the lives of its residents. Although his struggle to increase the stature of Las Cruces had financial implications, his labor did help modernize the town and turn it in the direction of the twentieth century. Combining
expansive and aggressive capitalism with civic consciousness, Rynerson was a typical example of the booster-businessman who controlled western politics in the late nineteenth century.

NOTES


8. Santa Fe New Mexican, Jan. 14, 1868.
12. Santa Fe Weekly Gazette, Feb. 6, 1869.
13. Santa Fe Weekly New Mexican, Feb. 8, 1870.
16. Santa Fe Weekly New Mexican, Oct. 25, 1870; Borderer, March 20, April 24, July 3, 1872.
17. Borderer, March 16, 30, 1871.
18. Ibid., March 30, 1871.
19. Ibid., April 6, 1871. During the spring and summer of 1871, over a thousand Indians were assembled at Cañada Alamosa, and although area residents referred to it as a reservation, it never officially attained reservation status. Reeve, vol. 2, pp. 195-96.
20. Rynerson to Pile, Nov. 22, 1869, and Drew to Clinton, Dec. 12, 1869, U.S., Department of Interior, Indian Affairs Bureau, Letters Received from the Southern Apache Agency, 1869, Records of the New Mexico Superintendency of Indian Affairs; Reeve, vol. 2, pp. 193-95. Military records show that Rynerson was appointed post trader at Fort Bayard on April 27, 1869, and that he resigned May 9, 1872. Letter from Elmer O. Parker, Assistant Chief, Old Military Branch, Military Archives Division, National Archives and Records Service, July 6, 1972. In later years, the Rio Grande Republican claimed that Rynerson was removed as post trader because he persisted in criticizing the military’s ability to subdue marauding Indians. Rio Grande Republican, June 29, 1889.
21. Borderer, June 15, 1871. The Borderer failed to specify either the scientific or common name of the creature. Twitchell states that Rynerson
and Lemon were the two main Republican leaders in Doña Ana County in 1871. Twitchell, vol. 3, p. 203.


It is interesting to note that on Aug. 25, 1868, the Santa Fe *New Mexican* announced that Rynerson and Isaac Kelley were establishing in Las Cruces a newspaper to be called *The Montezuma Advocate*. Although the paper failed to appear, Rynerson acquired a printing press which he subsequently rented to H. W. Sherry, publisher of the short-lived *Rio Grande Gazette*. The press eventually became the property of N. V. Bennett who on March 16, 1871, issued the first copy of the Las Cruces *Borderer*. *Rio Grande Republican*, April 8, 1882.


34. Lamar, *Far Southwest*, pp. 159, 163; *Mesilla News*, July 6, 1878. Rynerson's partnership with Catron in the Seneca-Dexter mining case has already been mentioned. In March 1875 Rynerson collaborated in another mining case with Henry L. Waldo, a member of the Ring and a law partner of Elkins and Catron. *Mesilla News*, March 27, 1875.
46. *Rio Grande Republican*, Sept. 3, 1881; Feb. 11, 1882; Aug. 25, Sept. 29, 1883; July 26, 1884. These are the same John H. Riley and James J. Dolan who were key participants in the Lincoln County War. John Lemon was apparently the son of the John Lemon who was killed in the 1871 Mesilla Riots.
47. *Ibid.*, Feb. 24, April 7, 1883; Feb. 9, 23, March 15, 1884.
49. *Rio Grande Republican*, June 4, 1881; Feb. 18, April 22, Sept. 30, 1882; Aug. 25, 1883; Rynerson was also a director and incorporator of the


55. Santa Fe, *The Weekly New Mexican Review and Livestock Journal*, July 17, 1884; see the following letters in the Prince Family Papers, 1791-1918 (microfilm), Special Collections Division, University of New Mexico Library, Albuquerque: Prince to Rynerson, July, 1884; Prince to Rynerson, July 25, 1884; Prince to Llewellyn, July 25, 1884; Prince to Riley, Aug. 4, 1884; Prince to Newcomb, Aug. 4, 1884; Prince to Fountain, Aug. 4, 1884. Thomas B. Catron's role in the 1884 Republican nominations is not clear. The controversy surrounding his role is explored by Victor Westphall in his forthcoming book on Thomas Benton Catron to be published by The University of Arizona Press (in press). I am grateful to Dr. Westphall for permitting me to see relevant material from his manuscript. See also Hoover, pp. 71-73, and the note by J. Sloan [1884], Thomas B. Catron Papers, box labeled Political Campaigns, New Mexico, 1878-1906, Special Collections Division, University of New Mexico Library, Albuquerque. Hereafter cited as Catron Papers.


60. Black to Prince, Sept. 17, [1884], Crawford to Prince, Sept. 21, 1884, Prince Papers, folder marked Letters Received, Sept. 1884; *Rio Grande Republican*, Nov. 15, 1884. In the election Joseph received 12,271 votes; Prince, 9,930 votes; Rynerson, 5,192 votes. Twitchell, vol. 2, p. 500.
Rynerson was the people's choice in Doña Ana County, receiving 947 votes, while Joseph received 436 votes, and Prince received 21 votes. \textit{Rio Grande Republican}, Nov. 15, 1884.


63. Santa Fe \textit{Daily New Mexican}, June 3, Sept. 6, 1886; \textit{Rio Grande Republican}, Dec. 24, 1887; June 15, July 6, 1889; June 14, 1890; April 8, June 3, 10, 1892.

64. \textit{Rio Grande Republican}, Sept. 7, 1889; \textit{The Daily News} (Las Cruces), Sept. 6, 1889; Rynerson to Catron, Feb. 11, 1890, Catron Papers, Correspondence 102, Box 6, letter 3011; Marion Dargan, “New Mexico's Fight for Statehood,” NMHR, vol. 15 (1940), pp. 158-59. Prince was appointed Governor of New Mexico in 1889. For New Mexico's statehood movement in 1889 see Robert W. Larson, \textit{New Mexico's Quest for Statehood}, 1846-1912 (Albuquerque, 1968), pp. 147-68.


68. Tularosa Land and Cattle Company, Articles of Incorporation, March 29, 1890, Catron Papers, File 608; Westphall, \textit{Catron}.


70. \textit{Ibid.}, March 20, 27, April 3, 1886.

