



## Parked in the Past

Parked in the Past - Samuel Hartsel, 1860s pioneer rancher

One of Colorado's first cattlemen, he founded town of Hartsel

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Samuel Hartsel came to Park County in 1860 and left in 1908. During those 48 years, he earned success and respect as one of Colorado's first cattlemen.

His operation became "one of the largest and best-stocked cattle ranches of the state," said a story in the 1919 book "The History of Colorado, Volume 4" by Wilbur Fiske Stone.

He also raised sheep and pigs and grew hay, wheat, rye, barley and oats on 15,000 acres of owned and leased land. He developed the Hartsel hot springs and built a trading post, wagon shop, sawmill and blacksmith shop at the geographic center of Colorado where the middle and south forks of the South Platte River meet – the beginnings of the town of Hartsel.

Hartsel was a handsome man, 6 feet 1 inch tall, slender, with a long, thin nose and short white beard. It was said in a story in the May 1942 edition of The Colorado Magazine that he resembled the national icon, Uncle Sam.

### Headlines today

One wonders what Hartsel would think if he read some of today's headlines. Two come to mind that might give Hartsel pause.

One story in the Jan. 11 Flume was headlined "Hartsel Springs Ranch Development Company files Chapter 11." The company has \$20 million in liabilities owed to 17 creditors, and, at best, \$10 million in assets, the story said.

Hartsel owned the first ranch to carry his name, and he was never in debt.

"It is a noteworthy fact that during his entire business career (Hartsel) has never given a mortgage on a foot of his land nor a chattel mortgage or bill of sale on even one cow or horse; he has bought only what he could pay for," said a story about Hartsel in the 1899 book "Portrait and Biographical Record of the State of Colorado."

Another story that might make Hartsel stop in his tracks is the continuing saga of Hartsel-area rancher Vern Wagner. He was described at his latest trial in February by Kathy Eberling, assistant district attorney for Colorado's 11th Judicial District, as "a rancher who left the cattle to fend for themselves during a harsh winter," according to the Feb. 8 Flume.

Found on Wagner's leased land during the winter of 2009-2010 were 143 head of deceased cattle, according to the Park County Sheriff's Office.

Hartsel also experienced harsh winters in his ranching years. One was in the early 1880s, when "every spear of vegetation lay four feet deep under the (snow) drifts," said a story in The Country Gentleman of November 1925 titled "Sam Hartsel and His Park." (The agricultural magazine was published in Philadelphia from 1831 to 1955.)

It said that when Hartsel saw the herds dying both of starvation and freezing, he and his cowboys "rounded (the cattle) up, drove them eastward out of the mountains and turned them loose." That might have worked, except it was a year of blizzards on the plains that year as well and dead cattle with Hartsel's brand were found the following spring east of Denver 150 miles away.

Hartsel, who was retired when the story was written (and had been dead seven years when it was published), was quoted by the author as saying: "I did then what I ought to have had the sense to do years before."

Hartsel fenced off the bottom lands of his ranch, acquired irrigation rights, and put up thousands of tons of winter forage from the coarse native meadow grass. He said that the native grass, when irrigated,

made excellent hay. Some ranchers had already begun the practice of putting up hay for the winter, and those ranchers were the only ones who pulled through in that blizzard-prone year, the story said.

### **Early years**

Hartsel was born in Bucks County, Pa., on Nov. 22, 1834. His cattle career started in about 1849 at age 15. The job was to drive cattle from Ohio to New York. It took four and a half months because Hartsel walked the entire way.

By age 21 he was driving a freight wagon from Fort Leavenworth, Kan., to locations in what was called the Far West, including Colorado.

He came to South Park in the summer of 1860 for the same reason thousands of others did. He was looking for gold.

When Hartsel arrived at the Tarryall Diggings, he was 25 years old. The Civil War was a year in the future, and Tarryall – near today's Como – and its rival city across Tarryall Creek, Hamilton, together were busy with 5,000 prospectors looking for easy pickings of placer gold.

Hartsel spent two unsuccessful months as a prospector, until his provisions ran out. Then he went back to what he knew best - cattle.

Hartsel hired on to herd cattle for two men named Bowers and Warren (their first names were not found) who are credited with the discovery of gold at Tarryall. In 1861, he went out on his own and founded his first ranch. The Pennsylvania Ranch was named after Hartsel's birthplace and was about three miles from Tarryall, possibly to the east along present-day U.S. 285.

At this first ranch, Hartsel's herd consisted of oxen that had brought

wagons west. He fattened them up and sold the meat.

In the early years of cattle ranching in South Park it was thought that cattle and oxen could not survive a South Park winter. Herds were driven to lower elevations in late fall.

One November in the early 1860s, Hartsel couldn't find two of his oxen when the winter drive began, so he left without them. The next April when Hartsel brought the herd back from the lowlands, the missing oxen were waiting at the corral gate. And they were in better shape than the rest of the herd. That's when Hartsel knew for certain that cattle could survive a South Park winter; that discovery gave a boost to the beginnings of cattle ranching in the Park.

On average, Hartsel's annual winter losses were "but two or three calves by the wolves," said the Dec. 5, 1874, Colorado Springs Gazette.

Unfortunately for the wolves, ranching in Colorado was the beginning of their end. As the predator turned to cattle as easier prey than wildlife, they were gradually eradicated. The last wild wolf in Colorado was killed in 1940, according to the Colorado Parks and Wildlife website.

### **Hartsel Ranch begins**

In 1863 Hartsel moved his cattle operation. He homesteaded 160 acres near a spot that would later become the town of Hartsel, the nucleus of his future ranching empire. His herd consisted of longhorn cattle imported from Texas.

To diversify his herd, the following year Hartsel went to Missouri to bring back 100 Durham Red shorthorns (shorthorn and Red Angus mix) and one white shorthorn bull. The drive was planned to last one year, but due to Indian uprisings

on the Great Plains (precursor to the American Indian Wars of 1866-1890), the drive took two years, and two of his men were killed in Indian attacks. The first year he got as far as Kansas, and in the summer of 1865 the cattle were finally at home on the Hartsel Ranch.

The 1925 "The Country Gentleman" story said the Shorthorn Association solely credits Hartsel with introducing improved beef cattle to the "Far West," beginning when he drove the Durham Reds from Missouri in 1865. It also says that even as late as 1925, "one notices among the mixed-breed cattle of South Park a tendency toward a white coat. It is the blood of (the) dead and gone white bull, a dominant strain which has prevailed."

Throughout the years living on the ranch, Hartsel had good relationships with members of the Ute tribe but had problems with the more hostile tribes – Arapaho, Cheyenne and Sioux. In 1868, a group of Arapaho (some historians say they were Cheyenne) took Hartsel captive. The aggressors had lost their way when pursuing their enemies, the Utes. Hartsel was released after he showed them the way out of the Park.

### **More than cattle**

Hartsel was one of the top cattle ranchers of his day, but that wasn't his entire business. He developed the hot springs at Hartsel for travelers. He also pumped the spring water to his home two miles away through a series of nine-inch-diameter hollow wooden logs.

Throughout the 1880s, Hartsel added more diversity to the ranching operation. In 1882 more ranchers in South Park were growing barley, oats and potatoes to supplement livestock diets. At the Hartsel Ranch there were 20 acres devoted to winter rye, winter wheat, barley and oats.

The crops were doing “remarkably well,” according to July 6 and Aug. 10 editions of The Flume.

Hartsel was a cattle man through and through, and in 1885 he put a stop to his dispute with neighboring sheep rancher, F. P. Euler, by buying his land.

Ironically, three years later Hartsel’s view of raising sheep was reversed. The Flume reported on Aug. 16, 1888, that Hartsel had added a flock of 100 Southdown-Shropshire-mix sheep to his ranching operation. Hartsel sold the wethers (castrated males) and spring lambs from the flock and also sold wool.

“Whatever comes from these sheep is clear profit, since they take care of themselves, furnish summer meat for the family, hunt for their own food and, like chickens, come home at night to roost,” he said in the Flume story.

And it was only a year earlier, in Oct. 1887, when The Flume reported Hartsel was raising pork. He fattened the pigs on native grass, rye grass and milk from his dairy.

Hartsel sold beef, mutton and pork to mine owners to feed to their workers and shipped carloads of meat to city markets on the Colorado Midland Railway.

### **Politics**

It would seem Hartsel had his hands full running the ranch and caring for his family, but he served the state as a member of the Public Land Committee of the Colorado Cattle & Horse Grower’s Association, and in Park County served as county commissioner and assessor.

### **Marriage, family**

On April 1, 1877, Hartsel married Nancy Boone Mayol. He was 42 years old; his

bride was 31. She was a widow with two daughters, Amelia and Rose.

Sam and Nancy Hartsel had four children, a son Samuel Bancroft Hartsel, who died in 1888 at the age of 13 months, and three daughters, Katharine, born in 1878; Myrtle, born in 1882; and Henrietta, born in 1886.

Hartsel had a brother named Joseph Hartsel who ranched at the head of Current Creek near Freshwater, now called Guffey. He disappeared in 1901, and it was suspected that he was murdered. A reward of \$1,000 was offered by Sam Hartsel and the county commissioners for an arrest of the “party causing his disappearance,” said the Aug. 28, 1903, Flume in a recap of events leading up to the discovery of Joe Hartsel’s body.

The brother’s disappearance was a mystery until August 1903, when a prospector by the name of W. T. Baker found Joe Hartsel’s remains and the remains of a horse near a tree on the Joe Hartsel Ranch. It was determined that the two were killed by lightning as evidenced by a torn boot and lightning damage to the tree, the Aug. 28, 1903 Flume reported.

A service and burial were held in Hartsel on Sept. 5, 1903.

### **Denver move**

The Hartsels sold all but 240 acres around the hot springs of their Hartsel property in the fall of 1907 and moved the following spring to a house south of City Park on St. Paul Street in Denver. Nancy Hartsel, age 64, died two years later in March 1910 of the grippe (influenza.) She was buried at Fairmount Cemetery.

On Aug. 22, 1910, the remains of family members Joseph Hartsel and Samuel

Bancroft Hartsel (infant son of Samuel and Nancy Hartsel),

were moved from the Hartsel Cemetery to a site near Nancy Hartsel's grave at Fairmount. The remains of Catharine Hartmann Hartsel, Samuel Hartsel's mother, were moved from a Cañon City cemetery on Sept. 26, 1910, to Fairmount to be near the graves of the other family members. She died at the Hartsel Ranch in 1873.

Sam Hartsel was two days short of his 84th birthday when he died on Nov. 20, 1918, nine days after World War I ended.

He did not have any illnesses, and even on the day of his death had visited his offices in the then-Ferguson Building at 17th and Stout streets in downtown Denver. Always busy, he spent his last years "investing and reinvesting his fortune in eight-percent real estate mortgages," said his longtime friend Frazer Arnold, who wrote the May 1942 "Colorado Magazine" article.

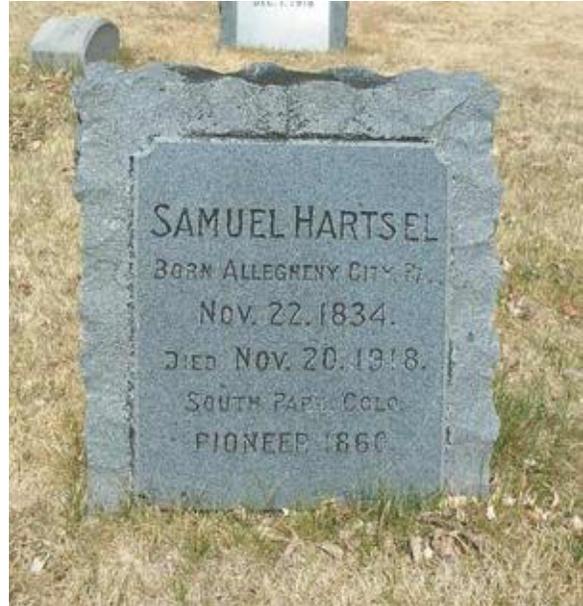
Hartsel is buried at the Fairmount Cemetery near his wife and family members.

**Images on the following page**



## Uncle Sam

A story in The Colorado Magazine of May 1942 mentioned Sam Hartsel's resemblance to the United States icon Uncle Sam. Hartsel, shown here in a late 1880s studio portrait, lived in South Park for 48 years. He was one of Colorado's first cattlemen and has been credited with introducing improved beef cattle to the Far West. (Photo courtesy of Park County Local History Archives, Samuel Hartsel Collection)



## Final resting spot

At the Fairmount Cemetery in Denver, a headstone monument honors Samuel Hartsel as a South Park, Colo., pioneer. (Photo courtesy of David Stearns)



## Lonely, deserted

The Hartsel Cemetery, with an estimated 10-20 graves, has fallen into disrepair. Sam and Nancy Hartsel's infant son, Samuel Bancroft Hartsel, and Sam Hartsel's brother Joseph Hartsel were once buried here. Their remains were moved in 1910 to the Fairmount Cemetery in Denver. The last recorded person buried at the Hartsel Cemetery CORRECT?, according to [www.findagrave.com](http://www.findagrave.com), was Irwin Gutierrez Brady in 1997. (Photo courtesy of David Stearns)



## Youngest

Henrietta Hartsel (left) and her sister Myrtle Hartsel were the two youngest children of Samuel and Nancy Hartsel. This photo dates to circa 1900. (Photo courtesy of Park County Local History Archives, source: Samuel Hartsel Donovan)



## Water Wheel

This water wheel was used by Sam Hartsel to pump mineral water from the Hartsel Hot Springs to his ranch two miles away. Piping consisted of a series of nine-inch-diameter hollow wooden logs. (Photo courtesy of Park County Local History Archives, South Park Historical Foundation)