



Hope and Reality in the Sunlight Basin, Wyoming: The Painter Family and John K. Rollinson

by W. Hudson Kensel

John Robinson Painter (left), hoping to strike it rich as a miner, brought his family from Philadelphia to a new life in the Sunlight Basin, only to abandon them. John K. Rollinson (right) also hoped to fulfill his dreams in the Sunlight Basin, but like Painter, left the basin without his dreams fulfilled. All photographs courtesy the author unless otherwise noted.

John Robinson Painter of Philadelphia came west to Wyoming in 1895 to hunt big game, but it was the prospect of even bigger game in mineral wealth that drew him back in 1896. His chance encounter with a prospector in the mountains around the Sunlight Basin of Wyoming converted Painter, a successful businessman, to a miner's life of eternal optimism and perpetual search. That search affected the lives of his wife and children, who joined him in northwest Wyoming, only to be abandoned by him.¹ Their lives became intertwined with John K. Rollinson, a former forest service ranger, who also attempted to fulfill his dreams in the Sunlight Basin.

The Sunlight region lies in the center of the northern Absoraka Mountains in the Shoshone National Forest, Park County, Wyoming. It is characterized by extremely rugged and beautiful mountain topography, a complex mass of jagged peaks and horns linked to long, sharp ridges with steep escarpments. Elevation ranges from four thousand to five thousand feet, with the highest point of 11,977 feet at Sunlight Peak. The ore deposits of this region are distributed in the cirque basins

¹ *Progressive Men of Wyoming* (Chicago: A.W. Bower, 1903), pp. 672-73.



Besides his mining activities, John Painter raised large herds of horses and cattle at the Sunlight Valley Ranch. This photo is from 1914 when Painter's wife, Eveline, along with the Painter's children, ran the ranch as a dude ranch.

and on the ridges at the headwaters of various branches of Sunlight Creek and the North Fork of the Shoshone River.²

The most common ore mineral in the Sunlight mining region was chalcopyrite, a copper ore. It occurs in most mineral veins and is dominant in more than half of them. Copper ore extraction was the principal objective of mining activities in the area, although there was some interest in the smaller silver, gold, and lead deposits. In 1890, the first mining claim in the Sunlight mining region was filed at the Big Horn County courthouse in Basin, Wyoming. As new discoveries were made, sixty-seven more claims were filed. The *Wyoming Stockgrower and Farmer*, a newspaper in the newly rising city of Cody, located about fifty miles south of the mining area, enthusiastically reported the mining news from the Sunlight region.³

Painter, caught up in the excitement, became associated with miners John Hughes, John Weaver, and Walter Hall, who were planning to exploit the silver veins of the Evening Star Mine. This first venture as a miner set him on the road to uprooting his family from Philadelphia and abandoning a successful profession of importing and selling Swiss musical instru-

ments. Painter had married Eveline Taylor in 1885 and by the time he first went west to Wyoming ten years later, he had a family of two daughters, Mary and Marguerite, born respectively in 1886 and 1888, and a son, William, born in 1891.⁴

Restless, hard working, energetic, enthusiastic, and persuasive, Painter was able to raise investment capital from his own business and from friends and business connections in Philadelphia and other eastern cities. He began buying existing claims and locating new ones.

² Willard H. Parsons, *Geology of the Sunlight Area, Wyoming*, Part I, *Volcanic Centers of the Sunlight Area*, reprint from *The Journal of Geology*, 1939, pp. 1-2.

³ Parsons, Part II, *The Ore Deposits of the Sunlight Mining Region*, reprint from *Economic Geology*, 1937, p. 833. Willis H. Nelson, Harold J. Prostka, and Frank E. Williams, *Geology and Mineral Resources of the North Absaroka Wilderness and Vicinity, Park County, Wyoming*, Geological Survey Bulletin 1447 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1980), p. 34.

⁴ "John R. Painter," *The Cody Enterprise, Big Horn Souvenir and Holiday Issue*, December 25, 1902, p. 16. See also *Wyoming Stockgrower and Farmer*, September 8, 1903, p. 8, and September 15, 1903, p. 5.

By 1903, he organized the Sunlight Copper Mining Company to consolidate his various mining claims as one business enterprise.⁵

For a few years, Painter returned to his family and business in Philadelphia when winter's deep snow and frigid temperatures severely limited mining activities. In addition to a cabin he had built near his mining claims, he built another in the eastern part of the Sunlight Basin where it is flat and nearly a mile wide. The Sunlight Basin trends northeast-southwest along Sunlight Creek, which flowing northeastward joins the Clarks Fork of the Yellowstone River at the southeast corner of the Beartooth Plateau. The area is characterized by rolling hills and some rocky spurs. Painter's cabin sat near Sunlight Creek that meanders extensively through the wide valley. During the summer of 1897, Eveline and her three children rode the Northern Pacific to Red Lodge, Montana, where they loaded on a wagon pulled by a four-mule team and continued the trip south to the new cabin. They spent the summer there, returning to Philadelphia in the fall and then boarding the train again in the summer for their vacation in Sunlight. This was a pattern they would follow until 1902 when they moved to the basin permanently. Earlier, Painter bought a portable sawmill and set it up to build a larger ranch house. By the time his family was there to stay in 1902, he had built a fine, wood-framed, two-story family house along with outbuildings and corrals. In addition to continuing his mining activities, he raised large herds of cattle and horses, produced hay, and developed an extensive garden for family use.⁶

Painter's dream of a new life and wealth in the Sunlight Basin began to be realized. He rented the house in Philadelphia and shipped the furniture, including an organ and piano, to Sunlight to furnish the new ranch house. The Sunlight Valley Ranch was a reality. Painter emerged as a major figure in the Sunlight mining district. In 1903, Painter's Sunlight Copper Mining Company sold one hundred tons of ore containing copper, silver, and gold. The Cody newspaper referred to him with awe and respect and his activities and comings and goings and that of his family were regularly reported in the business and social news. Between 1901 and 1910, miners swarmed into the Sunlight region and filed on 343 claims.⁷

Within a few short years, Painter's hopes for financial success with his mines had collapsed along with those of hundreds of other investors and miners. Even the giant Winona-Gold-Copper Mining and Milling Company, that had spent about two hundred thousand dollars between 1908 and 1911 to develop its promising thirty-one veins on Sulphur Creek, failed. In Cody, the *Wyoming Stockgrower and Farmer* had extolled the promises of Winona and other Sunlight mines and confidently predicted that they would soon be as famous as the mines at Butte, Montana. Instead, the Winona company ceased operations in 1911. In 1914, the company's machinery, tools, and other equipment were sold at public auction. Profitable mineral extraction in the Sunlight mining district had proven illusory. The region did not contain concentrations of metallic minerals that could profitably be mined given the existing technology. The mineral veins in the area are all narrow, ranging from copper-bearing veins a few feet wide to gold and silver veins a few inches wide. A vein might contain good ore for only a hundred feet, then become barren. Painter's sale of one hundred tons of ore in 1903 was apparently the only large shipment out of the entire Sunlight region.

In the end, difficulties and expense of mining in a remote, rugged mountainous region, in a short summer season and transporting the ores by wagons over poor roads to the railroad at Red Lodge, Montana, and on to a distant smelter at Denver or elsewhere, was ultimately unprofitable. When the Burlington Railroad completed a spur into Cody in 1901, the miners had high hopes the railroad would build a line from Cody up Trail Creek and over the divide and to the

⁵ *Mineral Survey*, numbers 305, 306, and 315. Unpublished Field Notes of the Survey of the Mining Claim of the Sunlight Copper Mining Company, courtesy of Marguerite Heald Phillips, granddaughter of John R. Painter.

⁶ Marguerite H. Phillips and Paul A. Phillips, interview by the author, La Mesa, California, April 4, 2004. The *Wyoming Stockgrower and Farmer*, October 24, 1907, states that J.R. Painter will go to Omaha with seven carloads of cattle from his ranch.

⁷ Nelson, et al, pp. 98-99. For newspaper references to the Painter family see the *Wyoming Stockgrower and Farmer*, September 15, 1903, p. 5, August 6, 1906, p. 4, August 30, 1906, p. 1, November 22, 1906, p. 1, January 17, 1907, p. 4, May 2, 1907, p. 4, and May 23, 1907, p. 1. See also *The Cody Enterprise* November 2, 1905, p. 5, and December 7, 1905, p. 1.



Eveline Taylor Painter continued to run the Sunlight Valley Ranch after her husband sought mining riches in Idaho. Courtesy Marguerite Phillips.

mining region. The spur never materialized. Miners also hoped a road for transporting ores would be completed from the Sunlight mines south along the North Fork of the Shoshone River to meet the new government road connecting Cody and Yellowstone National Park. In 1909, there was a scheme afloat by unnamed eastern capitalists to build an aerial tramway from the Sunlight mining district to Cody for carrying ores to a proposed smelter in Cody. Nothing came of these proposals and mining operations in the Sunlight district essentially ceased. Periodically to the present day, there have been flurries of prospecting in the region. Since 1910, nearly a thousand claims have been filed in the area, but only a few have resulted in actual exploration.⁸

Painter was fortunate to have a nicely developed ranch in the Sunlight Basin. In 1906, Congress passed the Forest Homestead Act that allowed Painter to move from squatter status to become a legal owner of a 160

acre homestead. He saw the advantage and filed for the land of his Sunlight Valley Ranch. Painter could have survived the demise of his dreams of mining wealth, but he could not survive the complications produced by his affair with the western novelist and Cody newspaper publisher Caroline Lockhart. Painter's involvement with Lockhart began in 1904 or earlier and became known to Eveline several years later when she learned Lockhart had stayed with her husband at the ranch while she and the Painter children visited Philadelphia. Painter continued his liaison with Lockhart, which effectively ended his marriage, although it would be several years before divorce made it official.⁹

During the first decade of the twentieth century, Painter acquired interests in mining property in the Salmon River country in Idaho. In time, Idaho would become his permanent home. He kept his Sunlight claims, but his interests in mining development lay in Idaho. When he left for Idaho, Painter abandoned his family. His reputation as a pioneer miner and successful rancher were well established, but for whatever his reasons, he turned away to begin a new life. In Idaho he continued to pursue his goals for mining riches and marrying Lockhart. By the time of his death in 1936, he had accomplished neither goal. In 1915, Eveline successfully petitioned as a deserted wife to have the Painter homestead transferred to her name.¹⁰

Painter moved on to new adventures in Idaho, leaving his wife and children to fend for themselves. Eveline, at this time in her early fifties, was inured to her husband's restlessness, but undefeated by his unfaithfulness. She resolutely assumed sole responsibility for the care of her three young-adult children, who in turn capably supported their mother in the man-

⁸ Parsons, *The Ore Deposits*, pp. 833-39; Nelson et. al, p. 34; *Wyoming Stockgrower and Farmer*, June 11, 1908, p. 1, December 3, 1908, p. 1, February 25, 1909, p. 1, June 4, 1909, p. 1, July 30, 1909, p. 1, September 17, 1909, p. 1; *Park County Enterprise*, July 11, 1914, p. 3.

⁹ Necah Stewart Furman, *Caroline Lockhart: Her Life and Legacy* (Seattle: The University of Washington Press, 1994), pp. 68-69.

¹⁰ *Wyoming Stockgrower and Farmer*, April 8, 1909, p. 5; Furman, *Caroline Lockhart*, pp. 75-76; *Park County Enterprise*, August 18, 1915, p. 6.



John and Eveline Painter's daughters, Mary (left) and Marguerite, August, 1914.

agement of the ranch. Though Eveline and the children would periodically visit the old home and relatives in the East, it was only a diversion. Their commitment was to the ranch home in Sunlight Basin. Eveline's life centered on her children and ranch activities and visits with neighbors like the Alpheus Beem family, who lived across Sunlight Creek, or with friends who visited Cody. She rarely traveled to Cody, and when she did it was mainly for business matters. The children, however, had friends in Cody and made the difficult trip there fairly regularly during the summer months. Cold winters and deep snow could preclude any travel out of the basin for months on end. The isolation was breached only by the telephone line that had been strung in to serve the needs of the ranger station and by the weekly mail service that came to the Painter mailbox.¹¹

The Sunlight Basin is not remote in the sense of

being miles from any place. Its remoteness is defined by mountainous walls to the west, south, and north and on the east by the formidable bastion of Dead Indian Hill rising steeply to 8,060 feet from a valley floor at about 5,500 feet.

Before Cody was founded during the late 1890s, the earliest settlers in the Sunlight Basin made a long difficult trip to Cooke City or Livingston, Montana, for their supplies. With the development of the Sunlight mines and Cody emerging as their supply center, Painter and other miners built a rough, but passable, wagon road which led out of the mining areas and then rose steeply up Dead Indian Hill. In 1909, a number of the Sunlight ranchers working cooperatively were partially able to reduce the grade of the road by building a serpentine road from Sunlight Creek up to the top of a slide area that had been considered the most dangerous section. In 1913, with the combined funding of the forest service, the Sunlight residents, and Park County commissioners, the road going east up the hill was improved to a twelve percent grade. The road was still steep, but not as steep as before when it was nearly imperative that a tree be cut on top of the hill and roped to the rear of a freight wagon to keep it from plunging down the precipitous decline.¹²

Among those men in 1909, who worked to ease the grade up Dead Indian Hill, was John K. Rollinson, a ranger for the forest service. The forest service donated his time as part of its contributions to road improvement. By this time, Rollinson was acquainted with the members of the Painter family.

If the hopes of the Painter family for mining riches had drawn them to the Sunlight Basin, it was romantic notions of becoming a cowboy that inspired nineteen-year-old Rollinson to leave his home in Buffalo, New York, and travel west. He got off the train in Cheyenne, Wyoming, in August 1903, and soon found work as a ranch hand. Later he was hired as a cowboy on a ranch of the huge Swan Land and Cattle Com-

¹¹ "Pearl Beem Horner," *The Park County Story* (Dallas: Taylor Publishing Co., 1980), p. 124; "John Robinson Painter Family," *The Park County Story*, p. 166.

¹² John K. Rollinson, *Pony Trails in Wyoming* (Caldwell, Idaho: The Caxton Printers, Ltd., 1941), pp. 387-88; *Wyoming Stockgrower and Farmer*, November 5, 1909, p. 4; *Park County Enterprise*, July 2, 1913, p. 1.

pany. He married a local girl and by November 1905 had moved to Cody in search of opportunities in this new, growing town. He found employment as a carpenter and forest service guard to support himself and his wife Jessie.¹³ He preferred the cowboy life and hoped to own a ranch some day, but lacking funds he applied for a full-time appointment in the newly created forest service. In February 1907, he was appointed as a full-time ranger in the Yellowstone Timber Reserve. He reported to the ranger station in the Sunlight Basin as assistant to Jesse W. Nelson.¹⁴ The next year the Sunlight ranger district would become a part of the Shoshone National Forest created out of the northeastern quarter of the old Yellowstone Timber Reserve. The Sunlight district covered the entire region drained by the tributaries of the Upper Clarks Fork of the Yellowstone River, which included Sunlight and Crandall creeks among many others, as well as an extensive area between the headwaters of the Shoshone River and Cooke City. Nelson was transferred to a new post shortly after Rollinson arrived and Rollinson was left alone for several months to supervise the vast area before an assistant arrived.¹⁵

As Rollinson assumed his duties as a ranger at the Sunlight station, he was disconcerted by the knowledge that his wife would not join him there. Jessie had been raised in comfortable circumstances in Detroit by her wealthy grandfather, but she had managed to make the adjustment to the more primitive conditions in Cody and was willing to live there. She did, however, refuse to join her husband at the bleakly furnished and isolated cabin at the Sunlight station. Rollinson was equally adamant and refused to give up his work in the wilderness because he disliked urban life and thought he needed to earn his living in the range country. In November 1907, just two years after she arrived, Jessie left Cody forever to begin a new life in Detroit. She obtained a divorce from Rollinson a number of years later.¹⁶

The Sunlight ranger station was only two miles from the Painter ranch, and Rollinson, who made an effort to meet everyone in his district, soon became acquainted with the Painter family. Rollinson knew Painter only as one of the several ranchers and miners whom he met in the course of his duties as a ranger—it was a casual relationship. It was Painter's failure as a

miner and husband that set the stage for Rollinson's close relationship to Eveline and her children. It was only after Painter's and Rollinson's respective estrangements from their wives and Painter's departure for Idaho that Rollinson came to know and love the family who lived on Sunlight Creek. Many years later, Rollinson wrote his autobiography, *Pony Trails in Wyoming*, in which he recalls the openness and warmth of the welcome he was given at the Painter ranch house. These visits began in the winter of 1908 and lasted until 1915 when he left Wyoming. He relates riding after his day's work, especially during the long, cold winters, to the Painter ranch house to spend wonderful evenings reading and discussing books or listening as they sang or performed on their musical instruments. For many years, Rollinson was nurtured by the warmth and care of the Painter family.

Rollinson especially enjoyed talking to the youngest daughter, Marguerite. She was a tall, attractive brunette with a radiant smile and skilled in all phases of ranch life—riding, driving a team, herding cattle—as well as being educated and musically talented. She was the kind of all around outdoor girl Rollinson thought he had always wanted. These thoughts were complicated, however, by his marriage to Jessie, and though separated from her, he was unable to obtain a divorce through the court system for many years.¹⁷

Rollinson's work on the road up Dead Indian Hill in 1909 characterized the multi-faceted nature of his role as a forest service ranger. The impression given by his book was that he enjoyed the great variety of his responsibilities and the freedom to roam all over his jurisdiction in carrying them out. His job satisfaction, however, began to decline rapidly after his friend, H.W. Thurston, supervisor of the Shoshone Division since 1907, resigned in 1911. Rollinson was greatly agitated by the new regulations that soon appeared. When he applied for a grazing permit in 1912 for the small

¹³ Rollinson, *Pony Trails*, pp. 15-326.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 237-346.

¹⁵ Timothy Cochrane, Robert A. Murran, and Theodore J. Karamanski, "Narrative History of the Shoshone National Forest," 1988, prepared by Mid-American Research Center, pp. 34-48.

¹⁶ Rollinson, *Pony Trails*, p. 387; *Wyoming Stockgrower and Farmer*, November 18, 1907, p. 5.

¹⁷ Rollinson, *Pony Trails*, p. 365.



This image of the Sunlight Valley Ranch was used as an advertisement in *The New York Standard Guide* to attract tourists to the ranch when Eveline Painter and her children ran it as dude ranch. Courtesy Marguerite Phillips.

herd of horses he had, he was informed by his new supervisor, R.W. Allen, who was following the new rules, that he would be governed as a ranger by these rules and could keep only four horses and a cow. Rollinson also learned that if he wanted a settler grazing permit that would allow for more livestock, he would have to resign as a ranger. This development effectively ended Rollinson's career in the forest service as he felt he needed to keep more than four horses even to do his job as a ranger. Suddenly at loose ends, he took temporary jobs helping to guide tourists through Yellowstone for the firm of Frost and Richard, guiding hunting parties and freighting goods. In December 1912, he asked Eveline if he could work at the Painter ranch taking care of the cattle and doing other ranch work. She accepted his offer because her husband was gone and she needed competent, dependable help. Eveline had always had ranch hands to help with the work, but in 1913 she planned to invite paying guests to the ranch during the next summer to augment her income. Rollinson's skills as a horseman and guide and his wide experience and contacts in the Sunlight Basin would be useful in providing activities

for prospective guests. Eveline created an illustrated advertisement for Sunlight Valley Ranch and had it printed in the *New York Standard Guide*, a publication that carried information about New York City, but also included many advertisements for resorts, hotels, and the like. The ad with a photo of the ranch proclaimed: "Your vacation spent with us will be one long remembered for the delights of the free open air life here, hunting elk, mountain sheep, bear, etc. Your stay will be made a pleasant one." Eveline was on the threshold of becoming the pioneer dude rancher of the Sunlight Basin and Rollinson would become what later would be called a "dude wrangler."¹⁸

The arrival of the Burlington Railroad in Cody in 1901 stimulated the development of mining, farming, and ranching in the surrounding area and promoted the movement of tourists into the wonderland of Yellowstone National Park. Buffalo Bill Cody built the Irma Hotel in Cody and the Wapiti Inn and Pahaska on the North Fork of the Shoshone River to

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 402-07; *New York Standard Guide* (New York: The Foster and Reynolds Co., 1913).

serve the needs of the tourists on the road to the eastern entrance of the park. Tex Holm and the firm of Ned Frost and Fred J. Richard guided large parties of eastern visitors on tours of the park. Soon dude ranches and resorts such as Holm Lodge, Red Star Camp, Absoraka Lodge, Blackwater Lodge, Elephant Head Lodge, and others appeared along the North Fork. In 1915, Larry Larom began to develop his famous Valley Ranch in the South Fork and give his leadership to the organization of the western dude ranching business.¹⁹

Sunlight lay well off the North Fork path to Yellowstone, but it could offer spectacular scenery, hunting, guided trips, and other activities. The urbanism that many people sought to escape from provided them with the wealth needed for the expensive trip to the West. The Sunlight Valley Ranch could be a beneficiary of the boom in tourism that was just beginning if only people knew about the ranch. Whether through her New York ad or other means, Eveline made contact with A. W. Palmer of Haverford School near Philadelphia. Palmer, the director of athletics and a coach at the elite school for the sons of wealthy parents, made arrangements with Eveline to bring four Haverford teenagers to Sunlight Valley Ranch. In the

past, he had taken Haverford boys on western trips during the summer, so this excursion was not an exception. Palmer and his young charges arrived in Cody late in July 1914. Eveline and her son greeted them in town. The *Park County Enterprise* noted at the time that this was Eveline's first visit to Cody in three years.²⁰

Palmer chronicled the visit in August 1914 in a photo album. He identified his party as Barclay Harding Warburton, Jr., brothers George A. and John B. Huhn, and Brenton H. Wyeth. The album contained many photographs of the Painter family members, Rollinson, ranch buildings and corrals, and scenes through the Sunlight Basin. Rollinson provided activities for the boys. He took them on horseback trips to the defunct Winona mines and other interesting

¹⁹ For the development of resorts and dude ranches on the North Fork see W. Hudson Kensel, *Pahaska Tēpee, Buffalo Bill's Old Hunting Lodge and Hotel, A History, 1901-1946* (Helena: Falcon Press Publishing Co., Inc., 1987) and Ester Johansson Murray, *A History of the North Fork of the Shoshone River* (Cody, Wyoming: Lone Eagle Multi Media, 1996).

²⁰ Charles G. Roundy, "The Origins and Early Development of Dude Ranching in Wyoming," *Annals of Wyoming* 45 (Spring 1973): 15; Rollinson, *Pony Trails*, p. 407; *Haverford School Alumni News* (January 1947): 1-2; *Park County Enterprise*, July 29, 1914, p. 5.



Mary Painter entertained these sixteen-year-old boys, Barclay Harding Warburton, Jr. (left) and John Bell Huhn, both from Haverford School, during their visit to the Sunlight Valley Ranch during August, 1914.

and scenic places. The necessary work of the ranch went on and the boys joined in. They dug ditches, helped Rollinson and William Painter with cutting and stacking the hay crop, rode after cattle, and worked with the horses. Photos also show the boys reading and relaxing on the porch of the ranch house and having a boxing match. Eveline, Mary, and Marguerite provided good food, books, and musical entertainment.²¹

On August 27, the Painters and their guests were surprised to see Jacob M. Schwoob, prominent Cody businessman and car enthusiast, drive to the ranch in his little Saxon automobile. This was the first time an automobile had been driven over Dead Indian Hill, a feat heretofore thought possible only by horse or team. Schwoob returned without mishap to Cody, and the



William Painter, son of John and Eveline Painter, working at the Sunlight Valley Ranch during the summer of 1914.

following year when automobiles were permitted in Yellowstone Park, he drove the lead car through the east entrance. The end of August soon came for the eastern visitors. Rollinson loaded their baggage on a wagon and with everyone at the ranch waving goodbye drove his four horse team for the three-hour trip up the big hill and then on to the Burlington depot.²²

This first summer of operating a guest ranch convinced Eveline that operating such a business could be successful. The following year, in late June 1915, she welcomed fourteen more dudes to the Sunlight Ranch. Rollinson and William again were active in leading parties on horseback to places of interest and involving them to a limited extent in the work on the ranch. This was a bad summer for Rollinson, however, because Marguerite was in the East much of the summer and he missed her. Though unable yet to acquire a divorce through the court and thus still married, he, nonetheless, had for years hoped the problem could be resolved and he could legitimately court Marguerite. It was clear to Rollinson that Eveline disapproved of his attention to her daughter because of his situation and he respected her viewpoint. It is probable that Marguerite did not reciprocate Rollinson's romantic feelings. He was more like a close friend or big brother and Rollinson apparently came to that realization by the fall of 1915.²³ Despair set in. He was not going to get the girl, he might always be a ranch hand if he remained, and though he loved the country, he became despondent about his future there. At the end of his book he stated: "It seemed like the deck was stacked against me." He wrote a letter of goodbye without explanation to William, mounted his horse, and rode to the top of Dead Indian Hill where "I took my last look at the Shining Mountains, which, to my dying day, I will always believe are the fairest in that fair land and I will always believe that any man who has lived in the land of the Shining Mountains must be a better

²¹ Sunlight Valley Ranch photo album 1914, author's collection. Information on the four boys generously provided by A. R. Mercer, historian at the Haverford School, Haverford, Pennsylvania.

²² *Park County Enterprise*, August 29, 1914, p. 8.

²³ *Park County Enterprise*, June 23, 1915, p. 5, June 29, 1915, p. 5; Rollinson, *Pony Trails*, p. 403.

²⁴ Rollinson, *Pony Trails*, pp. 408-10.

American. . . ." It was the end of August 1915.²⁴

Rollinson's peroration as he topped the hill expressed the anguish of the loss of hope for a life he would never have. Undoubtedly, he had a sense of sadness as his pony walked the road to Cody. When he boarded the train there for his trip east his gloom must have abated as he thought of a new life with some interesting possibilities. His mother had unwittingly set the stage for a new career for him. She had divorced Rollinson's father and in 1911 had married Valentine Mott Pierce. The new husband was the son of Dr. Ray Vaughn Pierce, who, during the late 1800s, established a laboratory in Buffalo, New York, to make patent medicines. These concoctions included Dr. Pierce's Golden Medical Discovery, Dr. Pierce's Anurie Tablets, Dr. Pierce's Pleasant Purgative Pills, and several dozen other medicines along with various medical advice books. These medicines were sold across the United States and internationally and made Pierce a multimillionaire. In 1907, Pierce bought St. Vincent Island off the coast of west Florida for recreation and retirement. He died there in 1914 and his son Valentine inherited a one-third interest in the island—he shared it with two brothers—and became president of the World's Dispensary Medical Organization that encompassed all of the late Dr. Pierce's patent medicine business.²⁵ Rollinson knew this as he traveled to Buffalo and when he arrived there he accepted the job of managing the cattle and timber interests of St. Vincent Island, which his wealthy stepfather offered him. Rollinson was in the employ of his stepfather for most of the rest of his life. He worked on St. Vincent Island for a few years and by the early 1920s, with his mother and Valentine settled in Pasadena, California, he moved to the west coast and became district manager for the medical organization. He retired in 1940 and began writing his historical works. He died in Altadena, California, on March 2, 1948.²⁶

Meanwhile, at the Sunlight Valley Ranch, Eveline and her children continued to entertain dudes for a third straight season.²⁷ In February 1917, Mary Painter married George Heald, who operated the Pat O'Hara ranch, and later that year in October, Marguerite married George's brother, Edward, and moved with him to his newly acquired Trail Creek Ranch. William had married in 1916, but stayed on at the family ranch.²⁸

The loss of her daughters' help, the onset of World War I, and the nationwide flu epidemic of 1918 reduced the number of dudes and the ranch's capability to serve them. William apparently had no plans to take over the ranch and left in 1922 to take a job with the Northern Pacific Railroad at Laurel, Montana. Eveline, whose health and energy were declining, decided to sell her ranch to the well-known and respected Simon Snyder of the South Fork. Eveline moved to Cody soon after the sale was complete in February 1923. She died there two years later.²⁹

Rollinson's affection for the Painter family never abated. He visited Marguerite and her husband and their three daughters several times during the 1920s, 1930s, and in 1940. Marguerite visited Rollinson and his wife, Hazel, whom he married in 1927, at their home in California in the early 1930s. Rollinson maintained contact also by writing Marguerite and William and even sent patent medicine to old and ailing John Painter still down on the Salmon River in Idaho. In August 1940, Rollinson dedicated a large bronze plaque set in native stone at the summit of Dead Indian Hill. The plaque, designed and paid for by Rollinson, commemorated the historical aspects of the hill and included his name, those of the Painter family, and Sunlight pioneers who had worked to improve the road in 1909. The memorial was officially accepted by the Wyoming Landmarks Commission.³⁰

Since life cannot be perfectly scripted, it was in-

²⁵ "Valentine Mott Pierce," in *The National Cyclopaedia of American Biography*, vol. 31 (New York: James T. White & Company, 1944), pp. 286-87; "John K. Rollinson," in *The National Cyclopaedia of American Biography*, vol. G, 1946, p. 283.

²⁶ Letter from Rollinson to Marguerite Painter Heald, April 14, 1933, courtesy of Marguerite Phillips. In addition to *Pony Trails in Wyoming*, Rollinson wrote *Wyoming Cattle Trails* (Caldwell, Idaho: The Caxton Printers, Ltd., 1948); "Historical Sketch of Upper Clark's Fork of the Yellowstone and Its Tributaries Within the State of Wyoming," *Annals of Wyoming* 12 (July 1940): 221-28; "Brands of the Eighties and Nineties Used in Big Horn Basin, Wyoming Territory," *Annals of Wyoming* 19 (January 1947): 65-76. Rollinson's death was reported in the *Pasadena Star News*, March 13, 1948.

²⁷ *Park County Enterprise*, February 9, 1916, p. 5.

²⁸ "Edward Paul Heald Family," *The Park County Story*, p. 116.

²⁹ "Simon Snyder Buys the Painter Ranch," *The Cody Enterprise*, February 14, 1923, p. 1. Eveline Painter's death was reported in the *Park County Herald*, August 19, 1925, p. 5.

³⁰ Marguerite Phillips interview, April 4, 2004; *The Cody Enterprise*, August 21, 1940, p. 12.

evitable that the hopes of the Painters and Rollinson in the Sunlight Basin would differ from the realities of their lives. In their cases, the realities may have been an improvement on their hopes. John Painter chased the mirage of a miner's hope from the mountains of Sunlight to the rivers of Idaho. He never found the end of the rainbow, but he did what he wanted. He was a miner, even if it was not in the successful mold of his dreams. Caroline Lockhart helped to fix that, symbolically at least, when she featured him as a courageous, heroic, mining man in her novel *The Man from the Bitter Roots*. Painter's dream left his family

behind, but the reality of this was more beneficial than tragic. Freed from a restless and unfaithful husband, Eveline endured and prospered at the Sunlight Ranch. Her children eventually moved on to successful lives. Rollinson's youthful notions about the West and the direction of his life became pragmatic as he endured hard work, frustration, and loss. He had hoped to succeed as a cowboy rancher in Wyoming and marry the girl of his dreams. He never achieved this, but he remained a faithful friend to the Painter family and in his book preserved a vivid recollection of life on the early Wyoming ranges and in the deeply hidden Sunlight Basin.