

- **John Simpson Hough (1833 - 1919)**

I would like to nominate my great-great grandfather John Simpson Hough to the Santa Fe Historic Hall of Fame. Hough arrived in Westport, MO in 1850 as a sixteen-year-old, intent on becoming an Indian trader. Hough was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania on Christmas Day in 1833. He had first come west in 1849 with his father, Silas Hough, but had turned back when his father died, having contracted cholera in St. Louis. Hough returned to Philadelphia where he learned the wholesale dry goods trade from his uncles, but he had "sniffed the air of the Rocky Mountains and plains" and within the year he left home and "struck a bee line for Independence." Hough had only a dollar in his pocket when he approached Seth Hays for a job in Westport. Hays, admiring young Hough's wit, told him to see the wagonmaster for the job of ox driver. Despite Hough's neat appearance, the wagonmaster hired him. He was informed, however, that "those togs" he was wearing would stampede the cattle. Hough quickly exchanged his clothes for a "Hickory shirt, corduroy pants, together with a western hat" and the next morning set out for Council Grove. After arriving at Council Grove, Hays asked Hough to stay at the post, offering him \$75 per month and \$100 a month once he learned the Indian language well enough to trade with them. Hough made his home there until 1855 when he moved to Westport and engaged in merchandising. He also married Mary A. Prowers, the sister of John Wesley Prowers, who later became a cattle baron in Colorado. Hough became the "Clerk of Court" and when the Civil War broke out he soon took over the duties of chief clerk at the Fort Leavenworth Arsenal. In 1862 Hough went into active service as a member of Company E, 77th regiment and was elected a 2nd Lieutenant by his comrades. After the war, Hough took up the dry goods business at Council Grove. Two years later in 1867, he purchased a stock of goods in Leavenworth City and transported the goods and his family over the Santa Fe Trail to Colorado Territory where his brother-in-law, John Wesley Prowers had bought some land along the Purgatoire River from Thomas Boggs. The two families settled in Boggsville. There Hough opened a store in partnership with Prowers. Early in 1868 Kit Carson and his family moved to Boggsville and lived in the same house as the Hough's. As Kit's health was declining, he spent a lot of time at Hough's trading post. Hough wrote years later that it was "a sort of reunion of old time Indian Traders as we had Col. Bent with us a great deal." It was during this time that Carson gave Hough one of his Indian-style leather coats, which Hough treasured for the rest of his life, before bequeathing it to the state of Colorado. (see photo) In 1869 Hough moved his family to Trinidad, Colorado because there was a prospect of a school being started there that would teach English. Trinidad was also a good place to start a mercantile firm. Situated on the Santa Fe Trail at the gateway to Raton Pass, Trinidad had a promising future as a commercial center for the region. Hough opened a store on Main Street under the name of Prowers & Hough. Sometime in 1870 Hough started construction of a large two-story adobe house for his family. Unlike many of the crude buildings in the town, it was a fine residence for those days, built in the Greek Revival style with an elaborate front porch and a widow's walk on the roof. Dick Wootton admired it so much that he built himself a house just like it near his toll gate at Raton Pass. Hough and Prowers were also dealing in cattle at this time, and



Hough's brother, Silas, was bringing herds up from Texas. In the spring of 1871, a herd belonging to Silas and John Hough was moved from New Mexico to Timpas Station where Hough put up a small stock of goods. In 1873 Hough sold his house to the Baca family and left for another booming town on the Arkansas River, West Las Animas, which had sprung up around the Kansas Pacific railhead. The firm of Prowers & Hough established themselves as forwarding and commission merchants. Hough was involved in other ventures as well. He was a member of the firm of Prowers, Goodnight & Co., the heaviest shippers of beef to New York and Chicago, and in 1875 he helped organize the Bent County Bank. Early in 1876 Hough was in Denver as a Bent County representative to the Colorado Constitutional Convention. In 1880 Hough entered the political arena as the Democratic candidate for Governor of Colorado, but he lost to Fred W. Pitkin. At the time of his death, John S. Hough held the office of county judge of Hinsdale County. He had come a long way from boy ox driver on the Santa Fe Trail. He was one of many who helped take Colorado from a territory to a state, from a region of trails to railroads. NOTE: John Simpson Hough was the cousin of President Ulysses Simpson Grant. I did not go into detail about John Hough's life after the Santa Fe Trail, when he lived in Las Animas and Lake City Colorado, because I thought that his earlier life on the trail is what would interest you most. In his retirement years he wrote some reminiscences of those days, such as *Winter Crossing the Plains* where he tells the story of crossing the "horn allie" in winter. These are available in the archive at the Colorado History Museum in Denver.