



## Alexander and Emeline Rooney

*If Alexander Rooney (1824-1895) came to Colorado in 1859 under the spell of the gold rush, he soon parted company with the intemperate "fifty-niners" and the lawless life of the mining camps. Instead, the sober-minded man from Iowa turned to dreams of land and cattle, home and family. He scouted the open range west of Denver and reported back to his prospective bride, Emeline Littlefield (1835-1900), that ranching near Golden City held promise, but he confessed that she should not expect much in the way of "society." After two years of exploration and giving Emeline fair warning about the frontier, Alexander returned to Iowa where the couple married in 1862. Undaunted, Emeline became a full partner in the Colorado venture as she and Alexander set out by horse and wagon for the valley that would someday bear the Rooney name.*

*It was here, on land stretching along the hogback between Morrison and Golden, that Jefferson County's original Rooneys raised six children and assembled what would become one of the largest ranches between Denver and the mountains. By the turn of the twentieth century, the oldest son, Otis Albert (1862-1947), would succeed Alexander and Emeline and take the ranch (originally named the Iron Spring Ranch) into its second generation.*

*In the meantime, Alexander set an example of community service for his descendants, but most of his time went toward tending the ranch, raising horses and Galloway cattle. More important as a permanent legacy, he and Otis constructed distinctive stone buildings still in use today, including the main ranch house and historic barn. With blocks of sandstone they hauled from the flanks of the hogback and from quarries near Morrison, they perfected the trademark skill of Rooney stone masonry that has been passed down to great-great grandchildren. During the years 1939-1959, grandson Alex (1902-1993), with the notable assistance of his sons (great-grandsons Albert, Otis, and George), added several stone buildings to the ranch, including the present-day Dinosaur Ridge Visitor Center.*

*Stories abound concerning early-day congenial relations between the Rooney Family and the local Ute Indians. Alexander is credited with preserving the peace between local settlers and the native population; indeed, it was probably his skillful diplomacy that won him and Emeline acceptance on what many Utes believed was Indian land. The Ute Council Tree, a ponderosa pine still standing above the ranch, has been maintained by the family as a symbol of good will.*

*Fourth-generation members of the Rooney Family still live in Jefferson County, and fifth and sixth-generation members still occupy the original ranch, which was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1975 and designated a Colorado Centennial Farm in 1985. The ranch and the family are now approaching sesquicentennial status in Jefferson County. If the county were to anoint a "first family," a family as old as the county itself, an anchor of history in a sea of change, the Rooney Family would surely qualify.*

*Alexander and Emeline Rooney were named to the Jefferson County Hall of Fame in October 2010.*