

Park County Local History Archives

ISSUE VII

NEWSLETTER

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WEBSITE: WWW.PARKCOARCHIVES.ORG

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ARCHIVES NEWS:

Tom and Denise Klinger’s newest book "South Park’s Gunnison Division Memories & Then Some" is now available at the Archives. The Klingers have published several books about South Park railroads.

The Park County Historical Society took their members on a field trip in July providing information from the Archives on Staunton Park, Hall Valley and the Whale Mine.

In June, Archives members joined Preservation Planner Amy Unger from the Park County Office of Historic Preservation, sharing a booth at the Bailey Days celebration.

ARCHIVES UPDATE

Summer is a busy time for the Archives, with folks traveling in Colorado. Many are interested in their family history and either stop in, e-mail or call to see if we have any information on their Park County relatives. From June through mid-August we assisted with the following genealogy research:

The Taylor ranch, originally owned by the Howard Robinson, Ahrens and Olieschlager families; descendants of the Estabrook family; the Stoll, Allen and Caylor ranching families and Judge Whitted from Fairplay.

Amy Unger, Park County Preservation Planner and Erica Duvic, South Park National Heritage Area (SPNHA) Projects and Grants Manager researched the Singleton and Orahoad cabins.

Photo orders were filled for a descendant of the McLaughlin family and for Ann Lukacs who is producing a video for the SPNHA.

A photo donation was received from the Baker family—their ranch is located on the west side of Kenosha Pass.

Archives members went on a field trip to Eleven Mile Reservoir and Eleven Mile Canyon only a week before a fire broke out in that vicinity. The locations of the town of Howbert (now under the reservoir waters) and the train stop at Idlewild, where excursion trips were taken on the Colorado Midland Railroad to pick wildflowers, were identified.

A 1939 map of the Como coal fields was added to the Archives collection. Preemption/homestead papers were ordered from the National Archives to augment genealogy research of historic families.

The Archives is open every Friday from 10 am to 2 pm at the Bailey Library.

THE TOWN OF ALMA by *Christie Wright*

When the first wave of "Pikes Peakers" came into the South Park area in 1859, many of them mined up on Buckskin Creek, originally called Fairchild's Creek, a mile or so west of present-day Alma, Colorado. The ore played out in Buckskin by that decade's end and many of the prospectors moved on. Those who remained, plus other area miners, discovered the rich silver deposits up on the Mosquito Range's fourteeners in 1871. Thus began Park County's silver rush, the precursor to Leadville's wild days.

Some of the county's large productive silver mines were the Moose and Dolly Varden on Mt. Bross and the Russia and the Present Help on Mt. Lincoln. Adjacent North Star Mountain hosted the Ling mine, named after John Ling, its discoverer.

Silver production figures for the county jumped from only \$20,000 in 1871 to an amazing \$188,000 the following year according to Charles W. Henderson's 1926 book, "Mining in Colorado." By 1875 the value of silver mined in Park County had grown to a little over half a million dollars.

The plentiful supply of rich ore required treatment and processing which was completed at several nearby smelters. Judson H. Dudley built one of the first smelters in the area in November of 1872 at the foot of Mt. Bross in a small town named after Mr. Dudley. Called the Mount Lincoln Smelting Works, it was occasionally referred to as the Mount Lincoln Amalgamation Works.

Nathaniel P. Hill then built the Boston and Colorado Smelting Works in 1873 about a mile south of Dudley. Hill was a Brown University professor who first visited Colorado in 1864. After studying various smelting processes, he traveled to Europe to observe their methods and built the first successful American smelter in 1868. It was located in Black Hawk, Colorado. Capitalizing

on his success, Hill constructed a second one at the confluence of the Middle Fork of the South Platte River and Buckskin Creek in 1872. An encampment naturally sprang up to house the miners and smelter workers, many who lived in tents.

According to the www.almafoundation.com website, a group of smelter workers petitioned the county commissioners to incorporate a town at the end of 1873, which was granted two days later. The settlement was named after a local merchant's wife, whose first name was Alma. Her husband was Mr. A. M. Janes, who at one point fancied a town named after himself. He tried to obtain government approval for a "Janesville" post office, which apparently was never granted.

As a typical mining camp, Alma saw its share of boom and bust cycles but has clung fast to its heritage and is now a thriving town at the foot of the magnificent Mosquito Range.



Alma smelter early 1900s: from Bob Schoppe collection

Smelter Process

After placer mining had retrieved most of the easily found gold, more sophisticated processes were needed to remove the metals from the ore in which they were imbedded. Ore was collected onto tables and stamp mills dropped heavy iron blocks onto the rocks, crushing them into smaller pieces, which were then run over copper plates containing mercury. The gold clung to the mercury and could be easily separated.

Smelters further refined the extraction process by using heat and chemicals to separate base metals such as silver, iron and copper from the ore.

COLORADO MIDLAND RAILROAD

by Linda Bjorklund

James John Hagerman had made a fortune developing iron deposits in the Michigan upper peninsula and iron-making in Milwaukee. When he contracted tuberculosis his doctors told him that he needed to move to a drier climate or not survive.

So, in 1884 Hagerman came west to Colorado. His health improved, but his ambition did not go away, so he became interested in the mining industry. It didn't take long for him to discover that one of the major problems in that field was transportation—getting ores out for further refinement and getting supplies and equipment in to the mines.

Railroads had just begun to make an impact and narrow gauge lines were already operational in major mining areas like Leadville.

Hagerman became involved with several other investors whose goal it was to build a standard gauge railroad from Colorado Springs to Aspen via Ute Pass.

While the narrow gauge lines (tracks three feet apart) more easily negotiated the curves and hills of the Rocky Mountains, the standard gauge (tracks four feet, eight and a half inches apart) were more easily integrated with railroads from the east coast.

The proposed Midland route was surveyed and construction began in 1886. The line started in Colorado Springs, taking much the same path as Highway 24 does now—over Trout Creek Pass, past Buena Vista toward Leadville, then west toward the Utah border.

To even the grade so the trains did not have to exceed a 4% a mile change in elevation, 17 tunnels were constructed along the entire route of 222 miles.

Tunnel numbers 9, 10 and 11 are all in the canyon between Lake George and the dam at the head of Eleven Mile Reservoir (formerly known as Granite Canyon). You can still

drive through them, as the road follows pretty much the same path as the tracks did. Only then the train pulled into a depot at Howbert, a ranch town that was abandoned and flooded to create the Eleven Mile Reservoir in the 1930s.

The standard gauge Midland line met the narrow gauge Denver South Park and Pacific line at the top of Trout Creek Pass and the wider track was constructed to run over the top of the narrow gauge. The cut in the hillside is still visible at the entrance to Chubb Park, although the tracks are, of course, no longer there.

Tunnel numbers 12, 13, 14 and 15 are located north of Buena Vista and open to auto traffic. The two longest tunnels—Hagerman Tunnel and Ivanhoe-Busk Tunnel—are located just west of Leadville.

As the Midland began operations in 1887 promoters sought to expand their appeal from mining operations to tourists. Wildflower excursion rides brought those seeking to pick huge handfuls of colorful flowers at the Idlewild stop just north of what is now the dam at Eleven Mile Reservoir. Separate cars were available to hunters, which were dropped at a siding in Hartsel and picked up on a return trip a few days later.

Competition between the railroads was extremely stiff in the early years. So much that, with World War I causing the federal government to take control of the railroads to guarantee the rail service that government needed, the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad was chosen to provide the service and the rest ordered to disband. The Midland was dismantled in 1921, the tracks having been removed for the iron.

By that time automobiles and trucks began to proliferate, so the Midland route, changing somewhat between Lake George and Hartsel to accommodate the addition of Spinney and Eleven Mile Reservoirs, grew into a highway system still used by the traveling public.

HELP!—TRUTH ON PARK COUNTY LEGENDS

by Jerry Davis

We hope some of our readers might help us in tracking the truth—or not—of some Park County legends, hard evidence of which has been lost in the mists of time. Computers have made it possible to search out historical information faster and from more sources than ever before. While the searching can support and enhance previous research results, it can also raise doubts about the validity of legends and tales that have been treated as gospel just by virtue of having appeared in print. The latter comes into play in a number of cases.

One such legend is that of Silverheels (aka Silver Heels), the heart-of-gold dance hall beauty who is said to have nursed many miners through a smallpox epidemic, only to be disfigured when she contracted the disease herself. After a lot of searching, the first instance in which we can document this tale is an article in the Saturday Evening Post of 11-4-1922 (8). If the legend were based in fact, why would it not have been documented in the early 1860s? The name of Mt. Silverheels itself goes back at least to 1862. Coincidentally, one in a line of well-known racehorses named Silver Heels was around at that time. Can anyone come up with a pre-1922 source for the legend of our elusive heroine?

Then we have the pairing of Benjamin Ratcliff, who slew 3 Bordenville School Board members in 1895, and Gottlieb Fluhmann, a rancher whose body was not found until 1944, although he had disappeared in 1893. Items in the Rocky Mountain News (2-3) & Denver Post (8-2) of 5-14-1895 speculate, with no hard evidence, that Ratcliff may have been responsible for Fluhmann's disappearance. The 20th Century then saw some highly-fictionalized accounts asserting that Ratcliff had in fact murdered Fluhmann. Very unfair and inaccurate information about Ratcliff's children was also put forward. In fact, his children turned out

to be upstanding citizens, having overcome great trauma in their early lives. This is a case in which apparently manufactured "history" has inflicted unjust hurt upon the Ratcliff descendants, even to this day. Does anyone out there have any other early, credible information that might shed more light upon Ratcliff & Fluhmann?

And then there is the story of some 35 Chinese miners, who supposedly were killed and callously left underground in an 1885 explosion at the King Coal Mine near Como. This tale has been passed on both in print and by word of mouth for many years. But diligent searching of materials from the 1880s & '90s brings up no contemporary accounts of any such incident. The search material includes reports from the state coal mine inspections that began in latter 1883. It seems very hard to believe that not a single soul, some Chinese included, among the hundreds of people in the King & Como area would not have "blown the whistle" on such an occurrence to one or more newspapers in Park County and/or Denver.

This incident has been traced back to an account in an unpublished 1964 University of Denver master's thesis. It was called "The Chinese in Colorado, 1869-1911," by Gerald Rudolph. He cites an obscure WPA document on the history of coal mines in Colorado as his source for the King incident. So far, that document is nowhere to be found.

There is ample evidence that the Chinese were often treated very badly in Park Co. and elsewhere. But it is very possible that the King Mine incident simply didn't happen. We would be most grateful to receive any information that might clarify this matter.

Do you know how Fairplay got its name? There are a number of different stories but we would like to hear what you know about the origin of Fairplay.

Send comments, requests and suggestions to
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