

Cañon City, Colorado 81215
MARCH 2014
 Volume 3 Issue 1

FRIENDS OF THE MUSEUM and HISTORY CENTER

NEWSLETTER

Royal Gorge Regional
 Museum and History Center

Reading Room
 for local history

Exhibits

Free admission

719-269-9036

612 Royal Gorge Blvd

www.royalgorgehistory.org

***In this issue: Volunteer of the Month: George Stevens;
 Story of Neroni; Spotlight on Exhibits: Royal Gorge Park***

Contents of this Newsletter:
 Page 1: Events, Exhibits and
 Museum projects

Page 2: Royal Gorge Park

Page 3: Spotlight on:
VOLUNTEER

Page 4: Florence housed a
 true horror story

Page 5: Prospect Heights
 School and Mercantile
 Building

Page 6: Join the Friends,
 DeWeese-Dye Ditch &
 Reservoir Company

Links to Websites:
Museumfriends.info

Fremontco.com

Royalgorgetourism.com
DeWeese-Dye Ditch and Reservoir.com



NEW EXHIBIT - DOWNTOWN!! WINDOWS ON MAIN WILL BE DRESSED IN HISTORIC THEMES

Staff at the museum is currently working with members of the Fremont County Historical Society and the Fremont Heritage Commission in designing new display panels for downtown Cañon City. These seven panels will highlight significant stories about our region's past including photos about our prisons, agriculture, mining industry, and our early settlers just to name a few. The goal is to have the panels completed and exhibited in vacant downtown store windows by Blossom Festival Weekend. The Fremont County Historical Society is sponsoring the panels with help from the City of Cañon City, the Royal Gorge Regional Museum and History Center, and the Museum of Colorado Prisons.



Royal Gorge Park

Royal Gorge Park is the largest and best known of the three Cañon City mountain parks. In 1906, Congress gave to Cañon City 2,000 acres surrounding and including the Royal Gorge. The gift was accomplished primarily by Guy U. Hardy, congressman and publisher of the Cañon City Record, according to records at the Royal Gorge Regional Museum and History Center. As early as 1903, Hardy lobbied in Washington D.C. at his own expense to get the Royal Gorge for the city.

The area west of Cañon City has long been the focus of interest for explorers, railroad builders and tourists. The first recorded visit was in 1806 when Lt. Zebulon M. Pike found he couldn't get through the gorge. It was again an impediment to the Long expedition in 1820. However, in 1845, Capt. John C. Fremont was able to find a way around it with the help of his guide, Kit Carson.

It was first called the Big Canyon of the Arkansas River by Pike and later the Grand Canyon of the Arkansas River. The term Royal Gorge was first used by the Rev. Richard Wheatly in September 1875 and it caught on as people became more aware of the spectacular wonder. While the Grand Canyon of the Colorado in Arizona was relatively unknown, tourists were already heading out of Cañon City to picnic on the rim of the Royal Gorge in the 1870s.

The railroads would soon change the inaccessibility of the Royal Gorge and make it a well-known tourist attraction. Engineers from both the Denver & Rio Grande Western Railway Co. and the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway Co. surveyed the gorge as a possible route through the Rocky Mountains. However, it wasn't until the discovery of silver in the Leadville area that it became financially feasible to build a railroad west of Cañon City.

The race to build tracks to Leadville caused what became known as the Royal Gorge War or railroad war. Both the Santa Fe and D&RGW had laid tracks to Cañon City, but there was room for only one set of tracks through the Royal Gorge. While the two railroad companies fought in court over the right of way through the gorge, competing track crews began building tracks in different parts of the gorge and upstream of the gorge. After some of the completed track was dynamited and other property destroyed in night raids, the two companies hired armed guards. They built forts and exchanged shots at one another. One of those hired to protect property and work crews was gunfighter Bat Masterson.

For the most part, the railroad war was bloodless except for encounters by work crews at local saloons. The court settlement awarded the Royal Gorge route to the D&RGW but allowed the AT&SF to use the tracks for 30 years. A few years later, the D&RGW bought the track rights from the AT&SF for \$1.4 million. The court decision allowed the D&RGW to complete tracks to Leadville and eventually to connect with tracks going to the West Coast. The Tennessee Pass Route put Cañon City on a coast-to-coast railroad route.

Besides boosting the economy during the construction years of the late 1870s, the railroad also opened the area to railroad tourism. The AT&SF was especially active in creating a tourism package for travelers on its railroad and advertised the route through the Royal Gorge. The trains also brought more people to Cañon City for health, business and entertainment reasons.

In 1929, a suspension bridge was built as a tourist attraction. Texas financier and bridge builder Lon Piper came up with the idea and funding for a suspension bridge over the gorge. He formed the Royal Gorge Bridge and Amusement Park Co. to run the tourist attraction.

(Copied from "Salute to Yesteryear" article, Cañon City Daily Record)

For more information, go to the Royal Gorge Website, Cañon City website or other Tourism/Travel sites for news of when the Bridge at the Royal Gorge will again be open.

For additional information on any of the articles in this newsletter, please visit the Royal Gorge Regional Museum and History Center



GEORGE STEVENS

Volunteer Spotlight Questions

Name: George Stevens

How long have you been with the museum? About 9 years

What do you do at the museum?

Research, give tours, data entry, and carpentry

What do you like most about working at the museum?

I like the atmosphere. I really like the artifacts. I like the people here; it is a pleasant environment. I also like to go out and take photos of historic sites here.

What is your favorite artifact at the museum?

The square grand piano and Dall DeWeese's gun cabinet

What is your favorite time-period in history to study?

From 1870's - 1920's, post-Civil War

If you could own one historical artifact in the world, what would it be and why?

It would be the pistol that Jesse James shot with because that is my real interest, outlaws.



Who's Under the Apple Tree?

Researched and written by Dorothy Cool

According to Antonio Noroni the broth from boiled children's bones makes the best soup. Antonio Neroni aka Bovori was an Italian emigrant who owned a nice little truck farm and orchard here on River Road back in 1907. Mr Neroni would load up his old truck with the fruit and vegetables he raised and park along a busy road, here in Florence, and sell his produce from its back.

The love of Neroni's life was for his housekeeper, Antonette Palmeto. Evidently, the feelings were not mutual, as the day came when he stabbed her to death. His hired man was old man Buffetti, a blind and deaf vagrant who slept in the shed out back. In a murderous rage Neroni slit that man's throat while he slept.

Somehow the neighbors, the Minichiello Brothers, were drawn into the ruckus. When they disappeared the authorities began an investigation which lead to the discovery of their bodies, also hacked to pieces. The gruesome bloodbath came to light as dismembered body parts were discovered buried in the vegetable garden and orchard. Then bloody knives and hatchets were found under the apple trees. Wheel barrow tracks led to the rivers edge where, to the horror of downstream towns Concrete and Cement, human lungs and entrails were found.

Silent Neroni was locked up.

Undercover agent Frank Sedesky aka Sandesko bravely had himself locked into the same cell. Pretending to be a member of the dreaded Black Hand, an organization of paid killers from Eastern Europe, he promised Antonio membership and full protection if he was an important enough killer.

Neroni spilled the beans.

He confessed to killing the first time when he was 12, while still living in Italy. He moved to Colorado after killing 3 others and authorities were closing in. He told how he craved human blood and roasted human was his favorite dish. Broth made from children's bones made the best soup.

In prison he was hated! While serving his sentence in Canon City's Territorial Prison he was always picking fights and biting chunks from fellow inmates. On Aug 20, 1924 Neroni died of traumatic shock following an altercation involving 2 prisoners and 1 guard. Investigation proved that his guard, a Mr. Tillman, had lent a hand in dispatching him. Little interest was shown in punishing Mr. Tillman and he served only 6 months in perfect protection among the grateful inmates.

For more information visit the Royal Gorge Museum and History Center, 612 Royal Gorge Boulevard

Continued from Page 5: **PROSPECT HEIGHTS - SOUTH CAÑON'S FIRST SCHOOL.**

The old school on Smelter Hill in this 1880 photo closed in 1885 and the building given to the smelter for an office building.

Anton Strainer, mayor of Prospect Heights and a native of this area, says the smelter closed about 1912 and at that time employed 85-89 people. He estimated the population of Prospect Heights in that period as about 200 people and seven saloons served the region. In addition to the smelter, coal mines including Nonac, Wolf Park, and Royal Gorge added to the economy of the town. After the smelter closed, the little school became a private residence and was occupied for a number of years.

South Cañon's First School

SOUTH CAÑON'S FIRST SCHOOL

Daily Record, Friday October 4, 29, 1983 - A look back in History by W.T. "Doc" Little

In the spring of 1880, Professor Frank Prentiss got his students out on the front steps of South Cañon's first school house for this group picture.

The school stood atop Smelter Hill on South Fourth St in what is now a part of Prospect Heights. It had four rooms and a brick restroom with separate quarters for boys and girls out in back.

This building was erected in 1874 to serve the growing number of families who lived around the American Lead and Zinc Co. Smelter. Within a year after this photo was taken, the South Cañon School District had 66 school age youngsters.

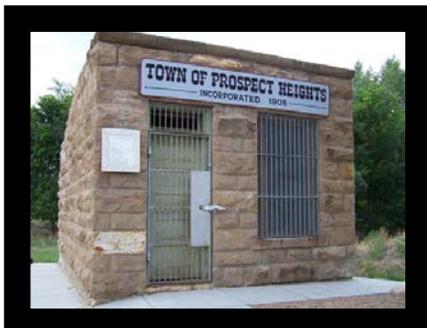
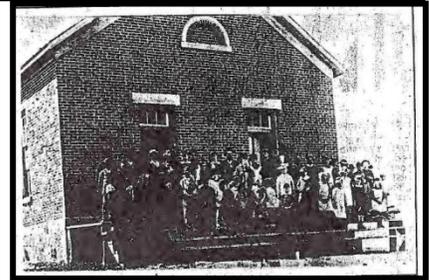
The South Cañon District was established in March 1871 and its boundaries sprawled from the Arkansas River south to the county line. By 1874, when this school was erected, The Wet Mountain Valley mining boom was getting started and several families there sent children to South Cañon to attend the new school. The district operated on an eight mill tax levy.

By 1885, the Smelter Hill School was overcrowded and the district erected the new two story, four room school on South Fourth St. using brick from the Catlin Brick Yard on South Second St. The building was later named Fourth Street School, and still later Alcott and finally, Garfield. Within two years, it too was overcrowded and in 1887 a substantial addition was built. This building was razed in 1983 and replaced by present School District Re-1 warehouse and bus garage.

The South Cañon district was formed. The first school north of the river was in Bates Hall, 518 River, opened in the fall of 1866. By 1872, enrollment reached 67 pupils and at mass meeting it was voted to erect a modern two-story school. But, not sufficient funds were raised or pledged and the plan died.

Not until 1878, was a mill levy approved for construction of a new school. The School Board acquired lots at Seventh and Macon and the following year began construction of the new Washington School. It opened for classes in the fall of 1900. This structure was razed in 1957 to make way for the present Fremont County Courthouse (Administration) and was occupied for a number of years.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4



The original buildings on "Smelter Hill" in 1905 are still standing at the end of South 4th Street.

Left: Prospect Heights jail
Right: Prospect heights Mercantile.

The Mercantile has recently been re-purposed into a used furniture/antique gallery.

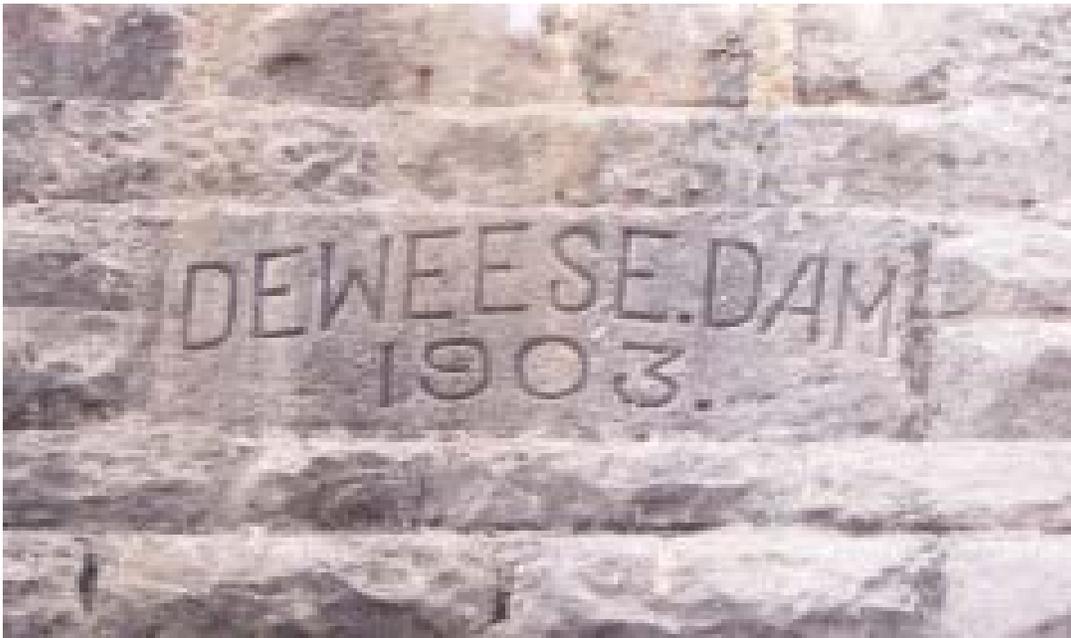
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Couple.....	\$ 15.00
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Friends of the Museum
P.O. Box 481, Cañon City, CO 81215 - 0481

DeWeese-Dye Ditch and Reservoir Company



Dall DeWeese and C.R.C. Dye incorporated the DeWeese Dye Ditch and Reservoir Company to bring water from Grape Creek to the Lincoln Park property they owned and were planning on developing called "Fruitland". They proceeded to construct the ditch.

They soon realized there was not enough water in Grape Creek to maintain irrigation in the late summer and fall. In 1902 they started construction on a dam north east of Westcliffe, Colorado which was to be called Lake DeWeese. During the 1930's there were two six foot additions to the top of the dam to enlarge the lake and store more water. The work was done with prison labor from Cañon City.

During the 1990's, the State Engineer condemned the top 12 feet of the dam and was going to restrict storage to the level of the original dam. The decision was made by the shareholders to borrow money to reconstruct the top twelve feet of the dam and the work was completed in 1999. The project cost 1.2 million dollars.

From the website: www.DeWeeseDitch.com