

NOVEMBER 1999

Colorful 'Prairie Dog' O'Byrne

There was never a more colorful character in the 1880's and 1890's than 'Prairie Dog' O'Byrne. While he lived in various places, he obviously loved 'Old Town' as he called it, where he partied and gambled with 'outlaws of note' Bob Ford and Eat 'Em Up Jake. Jake's base was Dodge City, Kansas but he was attracted as many others were to Colorado City during the heyday of it's wide open saloons, gambling, and red light district. John O'Byrne called himself a 'guide' - driving stagecoaches



'Prairie Dog' O'Byrne and his elk - Thunder and Button

to the top of Pikes Peak in raging snowstorms, teams of horses hauling tourists to the Garden of the Gods, and driving the earliest tour buses to Crystal Park, with its switchback roads and turntable.

It was in 1889 when he bought a pair of full sized elk, which had been captured in North Park, Colorado, and brought them to Colorado City where he incredibly 'broke them' to pull his

carriage. It is one thing to break horses to a carriage but elk are and remain very wild things. He often put a cage behind the seats with a prairie dog running continuously in a wheel, from which O'Byrne got his popular name of 'Prairie Dog.' He would gallop as much as trot around Colorado City between the saloons, visiting such houses as Byron Hames Hoffman House. He would tie the restive elk outside and go in to gamble his money away trying to beat Soapy Smith's Three Aces con game.

This all would have been colorful enough but he also loved to pick up Laura Bell, the Queen of the Red Light District of Colorado City and with him in his top hat, they would go racing down the dirt road of Colorado Avenue into Colorado Springs where the fine horses of the women on Wood Avenue's Millionaire's Row would smell those rangy elk, bolt, tip over, dumping the ladies into the dirt. He would be arrested and put

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MAILBOX

Dear Friends,

Now back home in the UK, we remember our short visit to your superb museum as one of the highlights of our all too short week in Colorado Springs last week. Keep up the good work a lovely education of local history made really enjoyable. Thank you.

Paul & Lesley Buckle
Paul.Buckle@usgateway.net

Dear Paul and Lesley,
Thank you for letting us know that you enjoyed what we are doing here at the History Center. Please keep visiting our website, too. We are adding more each week. Here's the web address for you, although I'm sure I remember meeting you and giving you our brochure with the URL on it. Just in case, here is again, <http://history.oldcolo.com>. Take care and hope to hear from you.

Paul Idleman, Director

Dear Dave,

Thanks so much for the newsletter, maps, and other information. Your article was great! We really felt you captured the spirit of Mary's story in your description. As soon as the bank account recovers from the Colorado trip, we're planning to buy a brick for the History Center. I still have to take those photos in for copying, then I will send them to you. Thanks again and please keep in touch.

Bob & Cindy Griswold

(editor's note: This is in response to the article that ran in the September West Word on Historic Manuscript Found....the Story of A.B. Wade in Colorado City) Bob Griswold's grandmother was Mary Wade, daughter of A.B.Wade.

Dear OCCHS,

Thank you very much for all the help you gave the ladies at our PPC Bazaar. Enclosed is our donation to the History Center. We really appreciate being able to use your facility. We hope to see you in 2000.

Bonita Wilkinson
PPC Bazaar Chair, 1999

Dear OCCHS,

Thank you so much for the hospitality that I was shown when I visited the center last month. It was very impressive and special to meet you all. What a surprise to find that I have known Jan's family here in Oregon for at least 35 years and had never met Jan until last month.

They say, "you can't go back", but when I come "home" to Colorado Springs, I disagree. Even though I have lived in Oregon 44 years, I feel like I just live down the street when I am in the Springs.

Pat Stark-Jacobs
jinxpj@aol.com

Dear Pat,

We greatly enjoyed your visit and meeting you. Please come and see us every time you are in the Springs.

Bits & Pieces

Technology Treasure Sale

Here is that information on the technology sale that you have been waiting to hear. It is going to be held during the first quarter of the year 2000. The exact date will be selected and publicity will be started in the near future. This event might be a *first* for the Colorado Springs area.

We know that you have already started digging through all your unused computer and communications equipment (and software). Please get it packed up and bring it to the Center. Please indicate, with a tag on the items, that they are for the technology sale. This sale will be a great way for you to get rid of things you no longer need and a way for people to pick up some good equipment and software at great prices. We will also make money for the Society.

More information to follow in future *West Word's*.

Remember: One man's junk is another man's treasure!!!

Membership Directory Updates

Please update your directory with the following new members (N) and member changes (C) :

Jan and Rusty Winters (N)
3921 Wesley Drive
Colorado Spgs, CO 80917
(719) 380-5291

Jackie Kozras (N)
8006 Ferncliff
Colorado Spgs, CO 80920-8003
(719) 282-3342

Diane and Thomas Hartshorn (N)
2620 South Blvd.
Colorado Spgs, CO 80904
(719) 630-7328

A BIG welcome all the new members.

From the Board

It took seven days by stage coach for the family of Hattie L. Hedges Trout to reach Colorado from Quincy, Illinois. In 1867, they came to Colorado City. She remembered, "We stopped at an old frame hotel that stood on Colorado Avenue and 28th Street where the home of the Stockbridges is now located."

She speaks of Indians on the warpath. "Three boys were killed near where the Antler's Hotel stands now" - they were herding cattle when they were watched by the Indians on the hill. The oldest of the boys was young Everhart. The Robbins boys were younger. They were brought here and laid out in the old log building which was the first state house. It was located on the north side of Colorado Avenue between 26th and 27th Streets. "I remember going with my sister to see the bodies. They were a terrible sight, scalped and speared, and they had placed their guns to their eyes and blew them out, and their faces and necks were all powder burnt. Oh, these were terrible times for everyone."

"People for miles around came and brought their families for protection from the Indians and were forted up in the old Anway House (located at 22618 West Pikes Peak.) It was a log house with a stairway going up on the outside. We were there with others in the front while my father and other men stood guard on the hill north of town."

After living in various towns, the Hedge family moved to a ranch on the divide, fifteen miles northeast of Palmer Lake, where Hattie met and married M. Trout on January 1, 1880. "We came back to Colorado City in September, 1887. Very lively times here then as the Colorado Midland Railroad had built their way through to the Western Slope. Everyone was at work and happy; no digression here. We had to live in a tent until we built our home at 713 South 25th Street. There were no houses to rent."

"Anthony Bott was called the "Father of Colorado City." He was very benevolent and was called the "Poor Man's Friend." His log house is just a few blocks west of my home on St. Anthony Street."

review by: Agnes Johnson

The President's Corner

The past month has been busy around the Center. We are getting ready for the Old Colorado Christmas event over the Thanksgiving weekend. We will be taking pictures with Santa in the Cabin. The B&B tour is approaching and I hope that you have purchased your tickets. With the Holiday seasons approaching, our book store is full of historic books and gifts that would make great gifts for all ages. Visit the Center and do your shopping. In the near future, you will be receiving an invitation to participate in our annual giving program. This is another way in which you can support your Society.

Happy Thanksgiving.

Gordon

The History of Inns on the West Side.....

Several weeks ago while attending dinner in the honor of the Current family, I happened to over hear several well-respected gentlemen of our community speaking about a very unusual event in the early history of our west side. If any of you know Dave Hughes, you also know this may be a good time to be listening! Well as I tuned into the conversation, I soon learned some extremely exciting gems about our past and would like to share them with you.

According to our historians, The Current family, one of the early residents of Old Colorado City, rented their house to some of the Indians, while the family lived, for a short while in the shed, observing the behavior of the group.

This seemed to linger in my mind and key the thought of, just how did the inns of Old Colorado City come into being? I was pointed to The Colorado City Journal of 1861, where I discovered the St. James Hotel was one of the first places to stay the night. It was a stage coach stop on the way to Denver. These coaches ran once a week carrying the U.S. Mail and passengers, leaving on Sunday morning from Colorado Springs and arriving in Denver on Monday.

Lucy Maggard, a forceful rugged lady of Colorado City, leased the Central Hotel, also known as the El Paso House. This large two-story building was located on Central Street, now Pikes Peak Avenue, between 28th and 29th Streets. The first legislative meetings were held in this Inn, and because the kitchen was the largest room, this is where the meetings were held. When it was meal time, Lucy was not to let her guests down, so she promptly ushered out the stately gentlemen and began her food preparation.

Inns of Old Colorado City became even more colorful as the railroad era came into being. One of the next inns to emerge was the Hoffman House and with this era came the gambling and prostitution.

As we moved from the 19th into the 20th century, the passion and love for the automobile brought a new kind of thought into the minds of Innkeepers, the Motor Courts. From the mom and pop courts, soon sprang the large complexes of modern day high rise motels.

Amidst the luxury of meeting rooms, swimming pools, and restaurants, the idea of the Bed and Breakfast emerged. There were always those who did not want to stay where large groups of people. At first it may have been financial, but later other factors came into focus.

These are the concepts that many of the bed and breakfast of today are capitalizing on. As you visit the bed and breakfast Inns of Old Colorado City you will find some similarity, but you will also find each is very unique. Some Inns concentrate on the business man, providing meeting rooms and technology hook ups. Others provide guests with very unique room settings. You will find in some of the Inns the guests are served by hired help, while in others you will be waited on only by the owners. There are Inns where the kitchen is the meeting place much like grandma's

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From the Board (continued from page 4)

house and some, where one gathers in a formal living room setting. Yet, in each of these, the common thread is hospitality, the one factor missing in the large corporate atmosphere.

This year I would like to encourage each and every one of you to visit the Inns in Old Colorado City. Christmas time is such a wonderful time to reminisce our rich heritage and these Inns here in the west side open these to the community. They are so richly decorated and inviting. Each of you must see the efforts of each Innkeeper and visit about the philosophy of each Inn.

On December 5th, these Inns will be open, and for a fee of \$10 you can tour all of them. Not only will you enjoy the beauty of each room but you will be supporting the diligent work of the Old Colorado Historical Society, who is receiving the proceeds from this event to continue to preserve the rich past that makes the west side and Old Colorado City the wonderful place that we call home.

Call the Center for your ticket(s) 719-636-1225 and on December 5th, visit with each Innkeeper about the history of each of these Inns, and enjoy the charm of yesteryear.

by: Leo Janzen

MEET ONE OF OUR MEMBERS

You would not believe the number of requests for information the Center receives via e-mails and letters. All this requires many hours of research and replying. Like the Knight in shining armor who rescues the fair maiden, *John E. Winters* rode to the rescue of OCCHS. You will find him busy in the research library trying to find the answers.

John was born in Fort Ord, California where his father was stationed. He went to many schools in many different places but graduated from high school in Widefield and in 1981 from UCCS with a major in history. He is at present the Rockledge Ranch Historical Interpreter. He has many interests, including learning the trade of blacksmithing at the ranch. He likes all kinds of sports - from baseball, tennis, hiking - to stream fishing with a spinner. He has one brother who lives in California. His mother is German and lives in Widefield.

John has written an article for this month's West Word and is in the next column. Welcome John to the Society and a BIG thank you from all of us for your help and personal contributions.

Colorado Diamonds

by: John E. Winters

The desert southwest had always been a place of mystery and tales of treasure. As early as the expedition of Francisco de Coronado in 1540, the men have searched for cities of gold. Even Jim Bridger in the mid-nineteenth century, said that diamonds and rubies were scattered everywhere, just waiting to be picked up. So, in the summer of 1872, when two grizzled prospectors deposited their leather pouch full of diamonds at the Bank of California in San Francisco, the whole financial district came alive with talk of Colorado's newly discovered riches. The two men, Phil Arnold and John (Jack) Slack, both originally from Kentucky were persuaded to reveal the location of their diamond mine on the premise that the bankers were interested in investing in the venture.

The two prospectors accompanied the president of the Bank of California, William Ralston, and a well respected mining engineer, Henry Janin, to Rock Springs, Wyoming. From there the group traveled by wagon to Northwestern Colorado to investigate the gem field. The prospectors blindfolded them as they approached the diamond mine. Once at the site, more diamonds and rubies were found, and Janin verified the value of the claim. A wild frenzy ensued and more than 25 companies offering \$200 million worth of stock put their hopes and dreams into the diamond fields of Colorado.

Charles Tiffany of New York validated the quality of the stones. Within a short time, a group of investors, including former presidential candidate, George B. McCellen, Horace Greeley, and Baron Rothschild raised ten million dollars and organized the San Francisco and New York Mining and Commercial Company. Arnold and Slack sold out for \$600,000 and left California.

Clarence King, prior to becoming director of the U.S. Geological Survey, had surveyed the region for the transcontinental railroad where the diamonds were supposedly found, and reported it to be a hoax. He said the diamonds had been scattered by human hands, and this was not an area where diamonds naturally existed. Also, a more precise investigation of the diamonds showed they had been cut, and that the two prospectors were reported to have purchased a large quantity of diamonds in Europe the year before.

So now the scheme was exposed and people had lost millions of dollars. Lawsuits did nothing since the investors had researched the venture and thought it legitimate. The two backwoods con men were never prosecuted, and had deceived the sophisticated California financiers! Arnold settled back in his home state of Kentucky and became a folk hero for swindling Yankees, and Slack lived 24 more years in New Mexico.

BBB Holiday Tour Tickets are on sale at the Center and many Old Colorado City businesses. Have YOU purchased your tickets? For ONLY \$10, you can have an fun and exciting afternoon.

WEST SIDE MEMORIES

TURNING BACK THE CLOCK ON LOCAL EVENTS

compiled by Jan Kuo

ONE HUNDRED TWENTY-FIVE YEARS AGO
October 1874

A match game of Base Ball was played on Saturday last, in the South Square between the Active Club and the College Boys. The latter were badly beaten, the score standing 63 to 9.

(Colorado Springs Gazette - 10/3)

The display of farm, garden, and orchard products sent from here to the Denver Fair took the premium of \$100 for the "second best display," and the Canon City fruit, also sent from our Fair, took the first premium on fruit of \$50.

(Colorado Springs Gazette - 10/3)

We don't know whose business it is to look after the ground round the Freight Depot, but somebody would do good service if he would throw a few loads of gravel on to the spot where there has been a big mud puddle for several days past.

(Colorado Springs Gazette - 10/3)

A U.S. Internal Revenue Officer has been looking round during the week, to see that no one has been defrauding the Government. We believe that he found no offenders.

(Colorado Springs Gazette - 10/3)

Thirty additional scholars have entered the public schools during the past week, and the teachers have been advised of about fifty more who will attend during the Winter months.

(Colorado Springs Gazette - 10/3)

There is a lady in Town who thinks that this is a "Wilderness" and "a God-forsaken country." The fact that about 3,000 people have settled here in three years, and that more are coming almost every day shows that she is in a glorious minority.

(Colorado Springs Gazette - 10/3)

Coming down the street the other day, we heard a pistol-shot a short distance ahead. We rushed to the spot, expected to find the material for a thrilling item under

a big scare-head. But we only found the Constable putting up his six-shooter, and a poor canine shuffling off the mortal coil. Downing says he is going to shoot all the dogs whose owners haven't paid tax. We doubt the legality of such action, but, for all that, people who care for their dogs had better pay up.

(Colorado Springs Gazette - 10/3)

We see that the Experimental Garden—a portion of it, at least—is being planted with Strawberries, which looks as though it were now to be turned into a Market Garden. During the last three years, that plot of ground might have been as beautiful and attractive as any ten acres in the Territory, with grass and flowers and shrubbery and fountains, and shady walks and quiet resting places. But all that the Colorado Springs Company has been able to accomplish is a rough board fence, two rows of pollard cottonwoods, and a lot of oat stubble, the whole backed up with a series of rubbish heaps. We had hoped that something a little more creditable was at least to be done, as we heard that the "Garden" was to be put into the hands of a landscape gardener, but present appearances are not very encouraging.

(Colorado Springs Gazette - 10/3)

On Thursday, F. H. Endres, saloon-keeper of Colorado City, was brought before Justice Lyon, on a charge of venue, charged with shooting William Burg, a carpenter, of the same place. After hearing the case, the Justice discharged Endres on the ground of insufficiency of evidence. It appeared from the testimony, which was given, that Burg went into Endres' saloon, drunk, and struck him with his fist, drawing blood. He was then put out of the saloon. Finding that he could not get in, he threw an empty beer-keg through the glass door, whereupon Endres fired at him, the ball going through his hat. Burg then attempted to throw another keg through the door, when Endres fired at him again, wounding him, though not dangerously, in the side.

(Colorado Springs Gazette - 10/3)

Judge Stone is the newly elected Deputy Grand Master of the M.W. Grand Lodge, A.F. and A.M., of Colorado.

(Colorado Springs Gazette - 10/3)

Colorful 'Prairie Dog' (continued from Front Page)

overnight in jail, while Laura Bell would be reduced to walking back the three miles to Colorado City dragging her gown in the dirt. The elk were named 'Thunder and Buttons.' This event with John and Laura Bell was repeated more than once!

O'Byrne bragged he could race from Colorado City to Colorado Springs in six minutes behind those elk. If you measure his claim from the very eastern edge of Colorado City (today's 19th Street to Colorado Spring's western edge (Limit Street near 8th), the claim is credible. However, from Old Town's center to downtown Colorado Springs, there is no way!

The elk were so rambunctious that John had to exercise and run them behind his carriage every day to keep them under control. What a sight they must have made, scaring every horse in sight, shaking their full rack of antlers and harness bells.

O'Byrne took a railroad brakeman's job and this forced him to move to Denver. He repeated his use of the elk there and repeatedly caused an uproar. It is reported that the same thing occurred in the Chicago area sometime later.

The elk ended up in Pawnee Bill's Wild West Show. 'Prairie Dog' travelled to California and Mexico, getting into one trouble after another. Around 1922, he returned to Colorado, where he wrote his chaotic memoirs. Old Town was dry from Prohibition and it was annexed into Colorado Springs by this time. The westside was dull again and John O'Byrne faded from the scene and Colorado City's colorful history.

by: Dave Hughes

A Visit with Winfield Scott Stratton

7 p.m. - Tuesday, November 30

East Library and Information Center, 5550 North Union Blvd.

Do you ever imagine what it was like around here when gold miners were striking it rich? Relive local history through the story of Winfield Scott Stratton, as portrayed by Richard Marold.

Stratton, a gold miner and philanthropist, was the first millionaire from the Cripple Creek district and generously shared his fortune with the town of Colorado Springs. Among his gifts were the Myron Stratton Home (established in his father's name), and his gifts of land for a City Hall, County Court House, Federal Post Office and a park.

Richard Marold is the director of the Cheyenne Mountain Heritage Center. His performance is shaped by family roots in the gold mining district of Victor and Cripple Creek and his life in Colorado Springs.

This program will be simulcast live on cable channel 17

*Have YOU Asked a Friend or a Relative
to Join OCEHS?*

Please do this today and help your Society grow!