



The Other Side of the Tracks

Growing up on the Other Side of the Tracks

by Don Ellis

For each of us, there are special places to which we are strongly connected. It's not so much that we love or hate those places, as that they are powerful parts of our personal history which seem to be ingrained into our beings. For me, one of those places is my old neighborhood, the neighborhood around Midland School, that part of the Westside on the other side of the tracks, ... when there were still tracks.

Of course, I have a lot of memories of being a student at the old Midland School, good ones and bad ones. But, my strong connection to the neighborhood really came from the walk to and from school. We lived about a mile and a half away. Luckily, there wasn't a school bus; and I had two choices, Wheeler Road, or the road that's now South 26th. Street. Wheeler wasn't yet paved, and there was a deep wash beside the road. A seeping spring near the top of Wheeler created a small wet meadow where sedges grew. Wheeler was a little shorter, but the 26th. Street route offered more chances to find selenite crystals and horny toads.

Horny toads, which are actually lizards, were sort of a big thing with my classmates who made an important distinction between the white bellied kind and "yellow bellies", claiming that "yellow bellies" would give you warts (not true). My classmates learned that if you turned a horny toad up side down in the palm of your hand and stroked its

belly, it would become docile as though hypnotized.

Bott Park, right across the street from Midland School was a pretty good place to find horny toads. The park wasn't landscaped or watered. And, it was mostly native grass, except around the old swing and merry-go-round where the grass was all worn off.

There weren't any horny toads close to home, though. The lizards farther up the hill where we lived were all the swift slender kind with turquoise bibs. I don't know why there weren't any horny toads farther up the hill, but it may have to do with the color of the soil. The soil around Midland School is all Pierre shale which is about the same color as a horny toad. Farther up, it's gravel which is a very different color, which would make it easier for predators to see and eat the relatively slow horny toads.

Mostly, I walked to and from school alone. But, occasionally I walked part way with classmates. One time I walked with Jackie Grainer, and we got into a fight. To my total surprise, I punched him out; and after that the two of us became good friends. One Spring, I regularly walked with Tony Gallegos. He was a small, slender gentle tempered boy; and I was drawn to him as I'd never been drawn to any other kid. He lived in the cobblestone house on the corner of Wheeler and Langmeyer that also had a cobblestone garage. Once, I asked Tony if he was a Mexican, and he told me, no, he was an Indian. At the end of the school year, Tony's family moved; and I never saw him again. For a little while, Bob Meyers lived with

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Old Colorado City Historical Society
 1 South 24th Street, Colorado Springs, CO 80904-3319

WEST WORD

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 1 South 24th Street
 Colorado Springs, CO 80904-3319

SUBMISSION DEADLINE IS THE 15th OF EACH MONTH

MISSION

The Old Colorado City Historical Society was formed to maintain the memory of Colorado City (1859-1917), to encourage research, preserve pictures, and keep alive the unique culture and spirit of West Side Colorado Springs through education of children and the community and through the establishment of a History Center.

MEMBERSHIPS

Memberships are welcome at any time. Membership renewals are due on the anniversary date of the initial membership. Members receive the West Word newsletter, discounts, local meetings and programs.

Annual membership classifications are:

Individual	\$20	Business	\$ 50
Family	\$25	Lifetime	\$150
		Corporate	\$250

Funds from a Lifetime membership are placed into a Perpetuity/Endowment Fund to be used only for projects which have been approved by two-thirds of the membership. Only the interest will be used for current expenses. We welcome gifts to this fund, which will be credited to the donor or as a memorial.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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MEETINGS

OCCHS Monthly Meeting & Program is held at 11 a.m. on the second Friday of each month, **except during June, July, and August.** The History Center opens at 10 a.m. on the day of the meeting for refreshments and visitation. The program begins at 11 a.m. This meeting is free and open to the public.

Next Monthly Meeting
September 12, 2003
At the History Center



Explore the REAL History
 at the
**OLD COLORADO CITY
 HISTORY CENTER**

1 South 24th Street
 (the corner of Pikes Peak & 24th Streets)
 (719) 636-1225

FREE ADMISSION

Old Colorado City History Center encourages you to attend its events, meetings, and projects. Please call 636-1225 for information

Summer Hours
 (June – September)

TUES—SUN 11 A.M. to 5:00 P.M.

Closed Monday

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Do you think you look like Laura Bell? Well then, enter the Laura Bell look-alike contest at the 23rd Annual Founders Day celebration

Founder's Day & Cemetery Crawl Activities

Pardon Me Madam

This year the Society is holding the **Laura Bell Look Alike Contest** in Bancroft Park at 11:00 am Saturday, August 9th. Laura Bell was well known as the most prominent Madam of the Red Light District in the original Colorado City in the Gold Rush days between 1891 and 1913.

There will be prizes for the best portrayal of that famed Madam: \$100 for 1st; \$50 for 2nd; and \$25 for 3rd. All contestants will be given a free pass to the **Cemetery Crawl** at Fairview where Laura Bell, as well as other colorful characters, is buried.

No one living knows exactly what Laura Bell looked like so contestants are invited to dress, speak, and behave how they THINK Laura Bell would have been like in those rip-roaring days when there were 21 saloons in a row on the South Side of Colorado Avenue. Gambling was upstairs and Cucharras Street was the 'Tenderloin District.'

Contestants will be given 90 seconds each to speak and strut before the judges. The Chief Judge will portray old Louis Unser, of the racing Unser clan from Colorado City, who lived here until his death in 1979. He described for the Society the death and controversial burial of Laura Bell in a taped oral interview in 1977, which along with others, is on the Society's web site.

Anyone may enter. There is no fee required but all contestants must be costumed and registered by 10:30 am in the park on Saturday the 9th.

There will be arts, crafts, collectibles, food, musical entertainment and displays in the original 1859 Cabin in the park both days. Hours are 8:00 am to 4:00 pm Saturday and 10:00 am to 4:00 pm Sunday. Events are free.

A Tour To Die For

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In Fairview Cemetery, 1000 South 26th Street – just 4 blocks from Old Colorado City - pioneers and colorful characters come alive as Society members and volunteers assume their identities and retell their stories during our **Sixth Annual Fairview Cemetery Crawl!** Costumed actors will be located by the gravesites of the individuals they are portraying. In addition to Laura Bell, visitors can meet Anthony Bott, Louis Unser, John G. Bock, a Civil War Veteran and other characters who spent time or found their final resting place in Old Colorado City



LAURA BELL??

Advance tickets are available at the History Center, 1 South 24th Street (corner of Pikes

Peak & 24th Street), \$5 for adults and \$3 for children. \$7 and \$3 at the Cemetery on the day of the event. \$2 discount coupons will be distributed both days in Bancroft Park.

WESTSIDE MEMORIES

compiled by Jan Knox

TURNING BACK THE CLOCK ON LOCAL EVENTS

Eighty+ Years Ago
June 1921

Workmen are now engaged in constructing a trail between the new Barr trail to the summit of Pikes Peak and Bottomless pit. It is being built by Fred Barr, builder of the other trail, and will make possible a comparatively easy descent into this great pocket of a canyon, which has always been one of the most fascinating features of the Sentinel of the Rockies. Mr. Barr is in the southern part of the state, securing additional burros for use on the trails which he has leading from the summit of Mt. Manitou. His Pikes Peak trail was completed, except for a short gap high above the timberline, when the snow set in last fall. It will be complete and ready for use this summer. It is a picturesque trail, zigzagging down the face of the mountain overlooking Colorado Springs and passing through an area of above-timber line ground where boulders as large as houses are piles upon each other like children's blocks. The trail is also a comparatively easy one of ascent.

At five o'clock last night, the bell on the Manitou fire truck began to clang and its siren to shriek, signaling the completion of the paving of Main Street from Ruxton Avenue to the Station, in record breaking time. The workmen of contractor, Charles N. Wheeler, who numbered nearly 100, laid down their tools for the last time, and collected at a long table which had been set in front of the Columbine cafe, opposite the post-office, on some of the pavement which they had laid. It was

all a-glitter with glasses and bottles of something good to drink. Waiters served a sumptuous dinner. A big crowd gathered on the side lines to look on, though they could not participate.

In the torrential rain belt, which stretched from Pueblo north to Denver and northeast to Nebraska, Sand creek, Fountain creek, Monument creek and Cheyenne creek ran wild all night. Shooks run became a river, as did Ruxton creek in Manitou Springs, causing serious flooding. There were no deaths in the Colorado Springs area. The most serious flooding was in Pueblo, where the rampaging Arkansas River caused several hundred deaths, damage estimated to be over \$10,000,000 and devastated the area for blocks on either side of its banks.

The new Broadmoor boulevard, the first highway dedication of 1921, was celebrated with a parade of more than one hundred automobiles, a mounted unit of cowboys and cowgirls, aides and special riders led by Spencer Penrose, the breaking of a bottle of champagne and a speech by Gov. Oliver H. Shoup.

Fire believed caused by the explosion of the gasoline tank of an automobile, early this morning, totally destroyed the machine, wood and blacksmith shop at the old Portland mill, with a loss estimated at \$50,000, mainly consisting of plans, patents and machinery stored in the building.

Dr. William A. Bell, who lived many years at his beautiful estate, Briarhurst, in Manitou, and who with Gen. William J. Palmer built the Denver & Rio Grande railroad, died Monday (6/6) at his home, Pendell court, Bletebingley, Surrey, England. Dr. Bell is survived by his wife, three daughters, a son (W. A. J. Bell of Denver), 18 grandchildren and one great-grandchild.

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Come join the fun and hear
Katherine & Duncan Lamont
Anthony Bott -
Blanche Barton -
Laura Belle, and others as
they were a hundred years
ago



OCCHS

CEMETERY CRAWL

SATURDAY AUGUST 9

SUNDAY AUGUST 10

COUPON GOOD FOR TWO
DOLLARS OFF ADULT AT THE
GATE OF THE FAIRVIEW CEME-
TERY 1000 S. 26TH STREET

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his uncle in the log cabin on the corner of Wheeler and Gold Camp Road, and we'd walk together. One time, we were taking a long time exploring on the way home, and Bob's uncle picked us up and gave us a ride in his Model T.

Bob's uncle was one of two people in the neighborhood who still drove Model T Fords. The other was an old woman who lived alone in a solitary white Victorian house at the base of "White Ridge" half a mile south of Fairview Cemetery. That house burned down over 40 years ago and was never rebuilt.

In the six years I was in Midland School, I only walked to the north side of the tracks once. That was to visit my classmate Gordon Hatch. Of course, after I entered West Junior, I walked to the north side of the tracks every time I walked to school. But, by then, it was actually the north side of where the tracks had been. The Midland Terminal Railroad shut down in 1949; and I started Junior High in 1952. The best route to West Junior was a shortcut across what had been the Midland Terminal rail yards near the railroad shop building that's now Ghost Town.

A few years ago when I came back to Colorado Springs, I found that Bott Park had been landscaped --- all lawn outside the play area, and no horny toads. Yes, it's nicer now, but a little bit of the character of my old neighborhood is gone.

When Cathleen Norman was writing the walking tour book, "In and Around Old Colorado City", I wanted her to include a tour around the old Midland School. But, she didn't think she should include a walking tour in a neighborhood without sidewalks. Since then, the City has installed curbs and sidewalks in almost the whole neighborhood. ... And, I feel like I, and my old neighborhood, have been profoundly violated by this. We've lost a very special part of the special character the neighborhood had for the previous hundred years. And, the other side of the tracks is a powerful part of my personal history which seems to be ingrained into my very being.

A PIECE OF HISTORY

HOW WOULD YOU LIKE TO OWN A REAL PIECE OF HISTORY? SOMETHING TO PUT ON THE MANTLE, HANG ON THE WALL OR JUST PUT IN A NICE GLASS CASE TO LOOK AT FROM TIME TO TIME? WELL THAT SORT OF THING IS READILY AVAILABLE. JUST GO TO CHRISTIES AUCTION HOUSE ANY DAY OF THE WEEK AND FOR A TRIFLING SUM YOU CAN PICK UP SOME REAL HISTORICAL ITEMS - FOR INSTANCE IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN AMERICANA A REAL RARE PIECE SOLD AT CHRISTIES - JOHN JAMES AUDUBON (1785-1851) *THE BIRDS OF AMERICA (DETAIL)*, LONDON: 1827-1838 SOLD FOR \$8,802,500 MARCH 2000 *WORLD AUCTION RECORD FOR ANY PRINTED BOOK*. A SHADE HIGH FOR MY POCKET BOOK, BUT LIKE ITEMS ARE ALWAYS AVAILABLE, EVEN SOME IN THE HUNDRED THOUSAND DOLLAR RANGE.

HOW ABOUT SOMETHING A LITTLE MORE REASONABLE AND CLOSER TO HOME? MAYBE SOMETHING FROM THE WESTERN UNITED STATES? HOW WOULD YOU LIKE TO HAVE GEORGE A. CUSTER'S SABER FOUND ON THE BATTLE FIELD AT THE LITTLE BIG HORN IN JUNE OF 1876? A NICE SIMPLE ITEM EASILY DISPLAYED ON THE WALL. MAYBE SOMETHING CLOSER TO HOME? SOMETHING FROM COLORADO HISTORY? A TRIFLE THAT SAT ON THE DESK OF WILLIAM GILPIN, THE FIRST TERRITORIAL GOVERNOR APPOINTED BY A. LINCOLN IN 1861. EVEN CLOSER TO HOME SOMETHING FROM COLORADO SPRINGS, SOMETHING OF A PERSONAL NATURE OF WILLIAM J. PALMER'S. AND YET CLOSER, SOMETHING FROM THE EARLY DAYS OF OLD COLORADO CITY? HOW ABOUT THE STAKE DRIVEN IN AUGUST OF 1859 BY M.S. BEACH AND R.E. CABLE ESTABLISHING THE COLORADO CITY TOWNSHIP COMPANY, OR EVEN THE OLD BATTERED COFFEE POT THEY CARRIED? A DRESS OR CHAPEAUX WORN BY LAURA BELL AS SHE SASHAYED TO THE BANK ON A NICE SUMMER MORN? OF COURSE ALL OF THE ABOVE WOULD HAVE TO BE AUTHENTICATED AND CERTIFIED.

WELL, THE OCCHS HAS SOMETHING IN STORE FOR YOU HISTORY BUFFS THAT YOU WILL NOT BE ABLE TO PASS UP. NEXT MONTH WE WILL BE MAKING A MOST STARTLING OFFER, AN AUTHENTIC CERTIFIED COLLECTABLE THAT WILL BE OF A HIGHLY LIMITED QUANTITY SOLD ON A FIRST COME BASIS. SO WATCH FOR THE SEPTEMBER ISSUE OF WEST WORD TO FIND OUT THE PARTICULARS ON HOW YOU MIGHT OBTAIN SUCH AN HISTORIC ITEM!

In an effort to update the Book Store we have prepared a Wish List: book ends — bookcase — hat rack — magazine rack — hand embroidered tablecloth or table runner (good condition only), also napkins — silk flowers

Call Betsy Evans (635 4782) or Joanne Karlson (475 2574) and we will pick them up. Thanks.

A blast from the past

More than a century ago, newly wed, my grandparents came to Colorado to begin their married life and start what turned out to be a very large family. They carried their worldly goods in a covered wagon followed by a buggy drawn by a fine horse they had received, amongst other things, as a wedding gift. They came from Wabaunsee County, Kansas a trip of about five hundred miles. It was quite an arduous trip in those days. By the time I came along (I was the third child of their third child) the covered wagon was long gone but the buggy still existed on the homestead they had perfected along the Turkey Creek, some twenty miles south of Colorado Springs. From time to time, on a nice Sunday, Grandpa would hook Mandy, an old plow horse he had, to that buggy and would take all the grandkids for a bumpy, swaying ride up the road and back and regale us with stories of how it was to come across the Great American Desert in that thing.

Last week I once again took a buggy ride, the first in over a half-century. It was not down a country gravel road with no traffic and grandpa telling us about the great adventure he and grandma had. No, it was down Colorado Avenue with its polyglot of evening traffic, honking horns, and tourists watching with curiosity and tentative waves as we passed by. We proceeded up and around Old Colorado City with Jean Christopher, our guide and long time society member, telling us stories about the early days of the town and pointing out houses, alleys and other points of historical significance. We were being transported in a beautiful buggy pulled by Rusty and owned by 3G's Front Range Carriage Service that regularly takes tours of the west side.

You can find Mike and Rusty at the corner of Colorado Avenue and Colbrunn Ct., just in front of what is thought to be the first capital of Colorado but better known as "the cabin". Mike dressed in his chauffeur's uniform circa 1900 along with his white carriage with the red leather top can be found on Friday, most Saturdays during the season when the Farmers Market is in progress and Sunday and Monday afternoons. We even saw the carriage once

gaily decorated with a big sign on the back saying "Just Married" as the happy couple inside waved to the folks on the sidewalks as they took a victory lap around the neighborhood. As I watched the young couple I wondered if my grandparents had done the same thing back in Topeka so many years ago. The buggy is rather posh with three soft padded leather seats and sports a leather top. Unlike grandpa's carriage Mike's carriage is quite modern and I'm sure meets all PUC regulations for such vehicles.

The Old Colorado Historical Society, has a rather unique arrangement with the buggy tours. Jean Christopher, a member of the society and one of our leading authorities on the history of the west side decked out in a custom sewn costume of the era produces a running narration interspersed with dates and facts about the area of Old Colorado City. When we approached Twenty-Fifth Street traveling east on Cucharras Mike took over the narration and pointed out the houses of ill repute once owned by no less an historical personage than Laura Bell herself. We were told about the now closed and inaccessible tunnels that run from the north side of Colorado Avenue to the south side where the "respectable" men of the time could move from the good side of the street to the tawdry side of the street in discretion. We were told that later the tunnels were extended to Cucharras Street where Laura Bell and like ladies of the evening held court in the houses along the street.

Needless to say my wife, two of my daughters and one of my granddaughters had a great time being driven through the streets of Old Colorado City in a beautiful carriage that my grandparents would have been proud to have taken to church on a Sunday before the advent of automobiles. It was nostalgic, very memorable and a great way to get a personal historic tour of that portion of Colorado Springs known as "Old Colorado City" which predates Colorado Springs by more than two decades.

3G's Front Range Carriage Service has graciously offered to give a discount to any member of our society for the month of August (\$15 per person which is normally \$25) so give Mike a call at 719-633-0556 and arrange your tour.

**FOUNDERS' DAY -
FAIRVIEW
CEMETERY
CRAWL**

The Old Colorado Historical Society is happy to announce we will sponsor the **SIXTH Annual Fairview Cemetery Crawl** in conjunction with **Founders' Day Celebration** on August 9th & 10th, 2003.

Join us for a full day of activities. Both events have been a huge success in the past so why not combine them offering a different and fun way to enjoy the rich history of Colorado Springs' Historic West Side.

Throughout both days, enjoy crafts and collectibles in Bancroft Park and a great bake sale in the Cabin.

At Fairview Cemetery, pioneers and former residents come alive as Society Members and Volunteers assume their identities and retell their stories! Costumed Actors will be located by the gravesite of the individual they portray. Each group of "Cemetery Crawl" visitors will stop at designated

points to hear stories of Cemetery Residents and their lives during the existence of Old Colorado City from 1859 to 1917. Enjoy the stories of up-standing citizens, madams, saloon keepers, businessmen and other characters who lived, spent time, or found their final resting place in Old Colorado City.

As always, proceeds from both activities will benefit the Historical Society. Tickets are available at both the History Center and at Fairview Cemetery on the days of the event. Advance tickets are available at the History Center. \$5 for Adults and \$3 for Children. \$7 and \$3 at the Cemetery on the days of the event. Hours of the "Crawl" are 2:00 pm to 5:00 pm at Fairview Cemetery, 1000 S. 26th Street.

"There will be arts, crafts, collectibles, food and musical entertainment from yesteryear by **The Rainbow Four, Serendipity Peak Dulcimers, Cliff Sanders, Jim Young** and more!"

Larue Ebersole reports that the old-outdated sound system has been replaced with a new one just in time for Founders Day. It should function very well for the future needs of the Society.

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Old Colorado City
History Center
1 South 24th street
Colorado Springs,
Colorado



Five Dollar Coupon
Good for purchase of

**In & Around
Old Colorado City
A Walking Tour**

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