



OLD COLORADO CITY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

VOLUME 21 ISSUE 9

November 2006

A WEST SIDE MEMORY

THE MERRI-LAINE RESTAURANT

By Leland Feitz

Merrill Crocker served good food and good fun. For 17 years, the Merri-Laine was one of Colorado Springs most popular restaurants. At 2411 West Colorado, it was also one of the west side's most successful businesses.

Merrill Crocker, a native of Buffalo, New York, opened the place in 1946 after being retired from a military career that had brought him to Colorado Springs. He turned what had been a run-down building housing a second hand store into a first rate dining room. Yet, he had no training or experience in the restaurant business.

Slowly, the place took shape with Crocker doing much of the work himself. He did hire Betty Thomas, a Manitou artist, to paint local scenes on the walls of the place. He had rustic furniture custom made in Woodland Park. At the end a well decorated Merri-Laine seated about 200.

During the remodeling of the building, Crocker and his wife, Lorraine lived on the



Post card from Merri-Laine

On the back; "a friendly place to dine"

Look for the Log Frontage across from Bancroft Park on Highway 24 - 2411 W. Colorado Ave. Colorado Springs, Colorado

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

WEST WORD

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 THE OLD COLORADO CITY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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LETTERS, PHOTOGRAPHS, ARTIFACTS AND STORIES CAN BE DELIVERED
 TO THE OCCHS CENTER OR MAILED TO:

WEST WORD Editor c/o OCCHS
 1 South 24th Street
 Colorado Springs, CO 80904-3319
 Or Merv Casey - thequill@adelphia.net

SUBMISSION DEADLINE IS THE 15th OF EACH MONTH

MISSION

Revised April 2004

The Old Colorado City Historical Society was founded as a volunteer organization to recognize the historical significance and unique culture of original Old Colorado City and early El Paso County. This spirit is perpetuated through the preservation of artifacts and archival materials, encouragement of research, education of the children and the community, through the membership and the operation of the History Center at 1 South 24th Street, Colorado Springs, Colorado.

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

President	Beverley Disch	719-634-5023
Vice President	Tom Hendrix	719-633-7392
Secretary	Arlene Casey	719-634-2356
Treasurer	David Hughes	719-636-2040
	Kay Atteberry	719-599-3187
	Eloise Wynn	719-633-9137
	Mel McFarland	719-533-1311
	Leland Feritz	719-229-8066
	Joanne Karlson	719-475-2574

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
 November 10, 2006
 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 - SAT 11 A.M. to 4:00 P.M.

Closed Sunday & Monday

Visit our web site for even more history!

<http://history.oldcolo.com>

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building's second floor.

Later, they moved to 1724 West Kiowa.

She held down a full time position with Mountain States Telephone & Telegraph Company. But, she also kept the restaurant's books, worked there as part-time cashier and sometimes as a waitress.

The Merri-Laine was open for all three meals, six days a week. The dinner menu changed every day but their famous chicken pot pie at 95 cents was always featured. A filet Mignon at \$2.75 was the most expensive item on their 1950 menu.

Merrill and Lorraine Hence Merri-Laine

And, those prices included an appetizer, vegetables, dessert and coffee!

Early in the life of the Merri-Laine, Crocker bought an organ and had it placed in the front of the ranch-style dining room. He did a very smart thing when he hired Jessie Atkinson to play it. Her amazingly long repertoire fit all occasions and delighted dinner guests.

While the Merri-Laine was well known for its food, décor and the organ music, old timers remember it even better as the location of the "Breakfast Club", then Colorado Springs' most popular live radio



Merrill Crocker is seen here with "Breakfast Club" guests.
A Betty Thomas painting of Helen Hunt Falls is seen in the background.

Continued on page 5

Treasurers Report

October 16th, 2006

July through September saw general cash contributions go up \$640 as it does in the summer tourist season, from both members and tourists.

We expended \$242 for two items to support our stand up historical programs. A spotlight to support our tape recording the programs for our digital archives, and a lavalier wireless lapel microphone so that speakers can move away from the podium. We now need a very good, large screen.

We also reprinted 5,000 brochures. That cost \$275.

Because vandals stole our small plaque on the brick wall in the Horse Alley at 2514 1/2 West Colorado Ave, we were able to replace it for a less elegant one for \$40.

Two outside lectures by a Board member and a group tour just garnered \$250 in donations. And the OCC Associates had their Taste of Old Colorado City event in which we participated. Our cut was a nice \$348.19

The opportunity to acquire three historical items were acted upon by the board in August and September.

First of all we were offered a mounted map for \$250 showing the route and every encampment of the 1806 Zebulon Pike Expedition within Colorado that reflects his journal reports. It is professionally done, the right size for our walls, and so is now mounted on the ramp leading to the back office.

We also were able to acquire a very rare original 'Dandy' style whisky bottle from one of our 1890's Saloons. 'Oxford Club, Colorado City' is imprinted in raised glass on it. It was recently found out in the open on the front slope of Pikes Peak where it obviously lay for the last 100 years. It is in mint condition, with that purplish tinge which glass acquires from sunlight. It even has its silver plate screw cap on it, with a cork washer. (No whiskey

inside though) We were able to acquire it for only \$125, even though a recently donated Hoffman House, Colorado City glass liquor flask cost a donor \$450. Such items from Colorado City's Saloon row are very rare.

Finally, by bidding on eBay the society was able to win, for \$55, an 8 by 14 inch mounted 1910 photograph of the inside of the 'Thrasher Grocery Store' which stood at '326 Colorado Avenue' - today's 2326 West Colorado which is now a bank parking lot. It shows five identified Thrasher family men inside the store. It also is a very rare picture of daily life from early Colorado City that was not in the Saloons.

All three acquisitions were paid for out of the Endowment fund's accumulated interest earnings which the Board feels is the proper source for paying for incidental new historical artifacts.

As reported in August, the Society was expected to decline by \$2,500 in its operating fund by the end of 2006. This was caused, in part by the requirement to put any Lifetime memberships and any Memorials into the fixed Endowment Fund. As of October of this calendar year, \$300 had been paid for two lifetime memberships, and \$1,660 has been donated in the memories of LaRue Ebersole, Jeff Disch, Barbara Keller, and David Bymaster, all of whom passed on this year.

However – and not yet finalized – we may realize up to \$3,000 income before the end of the year for a sale arranged by Don Kallaus of copies of 22 historical photographs we own, which a design firm from Texas found on our web site, and which wants to use in a government building in Denver. We already have sold reproduction rights to two other photographs to Canadian Broadcast Corporation for \$200. Other requests are pending. If these occur before the end of the year, we will show a slight surplus for the year, instead of a loss.

Dave Hughes
Treasurer



Colorado Springs women compete with each other for prizes during "Crazy hat Day" at Merri-Laine

show
pat-
- terned
after
the
popu-
lar network program, "Breakfast at Sardis".

Crocker was the genial host of the weekly show broadcast first over KAFA, then KVOR. There were fun-filled interviews, bingo games, music and prizes. Special attention was paid to those having birthdays, anniversaries or those having traveled from the greatest distance. Colorado Springs ladies dressed up and filled the place for the 90 cent meal and the good times every week.

There were special events. "Crazy Hat Day" filled the place with women in wild looking bonnets fashioned from lamp shades, boxes and assorted junk. Prizes were awarded to the most outlandish of all home-made hats. It was the

place's
most
popular
contest
and the

ladies laughed a lot over the awards, not always of much value!

After the second floor was turned into a banquet hall, the west Colorado Springs and Manitou Rotary Club met there weekly. So did the Westside Commercial Club. Pikes Peak Hill Climb banquets were held in the Merri-Laine's banquet hall.

During the tourist season, this dining room was swamped with business. Lorraine remembers one Chicago family of six who came to the Pikes Peak Region every summer for years and had all their meals at Merri-Laine. An up-front booth that seated six was theirs every season while they were in town.

In 1963, Merrill, by then involved in real estate, sold out.

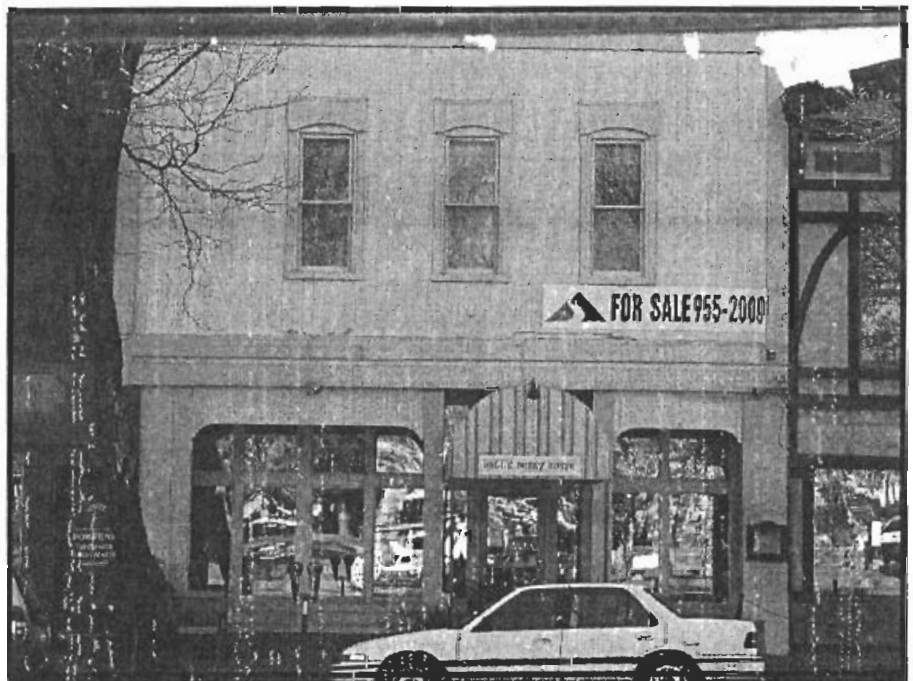


Women dressed in their Sunday best for the "Breakfast Club and a chance to be interviewed by Merrill Crocker over KVOR

The restaurant went out of business in about a year.

Not before and not since has Colorado Springs had a restaurant quite like Merrill Crocker's Merri-Laine.

The building where the Merri-Laine existed still stands today. Renovated and rehabilitated in the 70's it has hosted several different shops and is presently for sale. If you are interested the area code is 719.



From the Desk of the President

We've had a very busy fall at the Center. We have been cooperating with the Associates who are business owners in Old Colorado City. Larry Van Wert made our scarecrow and we were part of the judging of all the scarecrows in the area on September 16th.

We were asked by the Associates to participate in the Taste of Colorado City on Saturday September 23rd. We set up a table by the Artist's tent on the Avenue and Betsy Evans sold some of our history books from our bookstore. Kay Atteberry and Barbara Barbaro in period costumes circulated the Avenue with our brochures and sent people to our Center. As a result, we had over fifty people visit and who bought over \$100 in books at our bookstore. We shared the profits from the Taste of Colorado City with the library. Our share was \$348 for which we are very appreciative.

Then on Saturday, October 7, Scarecrow Days during the Great Pumpkin Weigh-Off, we were asked to help them with the Everything Pumpkin Bake Sale. Six of our members, Joanne Karlson, Betsy Evans, Marge Knorr, Pat Hughes, Bev

Patterson and Bev Disch provided baked goods for the sale.

Our next big event is our twelfth annual Holiday Bed and Breakfast Tour on Sunday, December 3rd from 2 to 6 in the afternoon. There will be ten stops and we are one stop on the tour and we'll serve coffee and Christmas cookies.

We will be having drawings for the door prizes with a special drawing for a night's stay at any participating B & B Inn. We will need hosts for two inns, cookies from our bakers and everybody helping by selling tickets to their friends. It's our major fund raiser so let's all make it a big success.

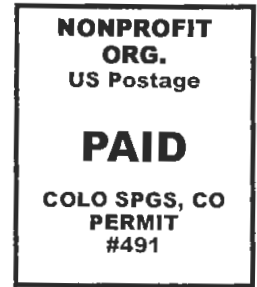
Bev Disch
President

-GIVE A GIFT OF HISTORY-

- *book or CD from OCCHS Bookstore
- *gift certificate from the Bookstore
- *membership in OCCHS
- *one-of-a-kind slice of history from a Garvin Cabin log
- *tickets to Holiday Bed & Breakfast Inn tour
- *gift certificate for a small group walking tour of Old Colorado City
- *personalized commemorative brick on History Center patio

Call Bookstore (636-1225) for prices and information.

OLD COLORADO CITY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
ONE SOUTH TWENTY-FOURTH STREET
COLORADO SPRINGS, CO 80904-3319



Friday, Nov. 10th Colorado History Program
"The Rest of Pike's Story...Setting the Record Straight"

Program begins at 11 a.m. History Center opens at 10:15 a.m. for coffee.

Lewis and Clark had fame and honor upon returning from their expedition. What happened in Zebulon Pike's life after his November 1806 sighting of Pikes Peak?

Keeping the historical records straight is the focus of Frank Tucker's program. A Colorado College history professor emeritus, Mr. Tucker brings an interesting perspective to end this year of the Pikes Peak region celebrating Pike's exploration.

Bring your friends. The museum has some new exhibits...come check them out!