



SOPHISTICATED?

Colorado Opera Houses

By Merv Casey

In the 1880's cattle drives over a mile long were still pouring out of Texas toward the railheads in Kansas. Colorado was being overrun with men digging up the mountains looking for those elusive elements; gold and silver. Fortunes were made and lost in the blink of an eye. Men like Horace Austin Warner Tabor, Jerome Wheeler, Winfield Scott Stratton and Jimmy Burns walked the streets of the great Colorado mining camps with millions of dollars in their pockets. And the folks back east read the lurid accounts of gunfights in the city streets, wild Indian attack, scalping, and all types of quite antisocial goings on.

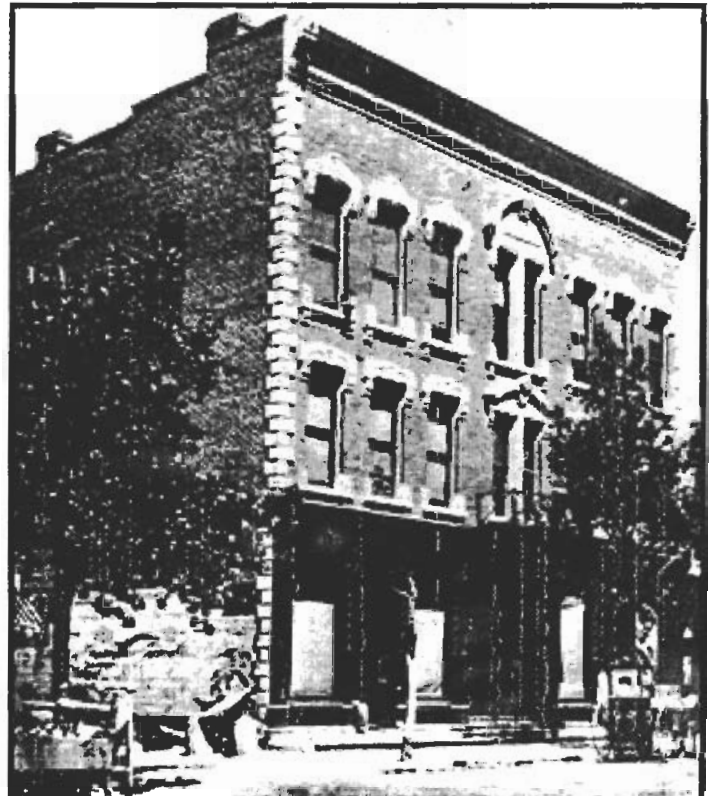
It was the days of the wild and wooly west and I rather imagine that Coloradoans were considered somewhere between Neanderthals and barbarians as easterners envisioned men wandering the streets with a six gun strapped to their hip spoiling for the next gun fight.

Unsophisticated – very, very, unsophisticated! But were our predecessors really the type of citizens that were portrayed in Ned Buntline's dime novels? So then, let us look at some of the facts!

Between 1880 and 1920 no less than 143 Opera houses were built in Colorado. Some grand and spectacular like the Tabor Opera House in Denver, or the Wheeler House in Aspen, but most were

small and cozy in the small towns scattered across the state.

In the era of Victorian houses, fancy horse and carriage garages in the back of many houses, Opera flourished in the west. It seems that every little town in Colorado had an Opera house of one sort or another. I rather imagine that Opera was the entertainment of the masses until the movies took the place of live performances. The many Opera houses that dot-



**The Colorado Springs Opera House
18 North Tejon**

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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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
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	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
March 9, 2007
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

Winter Hours
(June – September)

TUES – SAT 11 A.M. to 4:00 P.M.

Closed Sunday & Monday

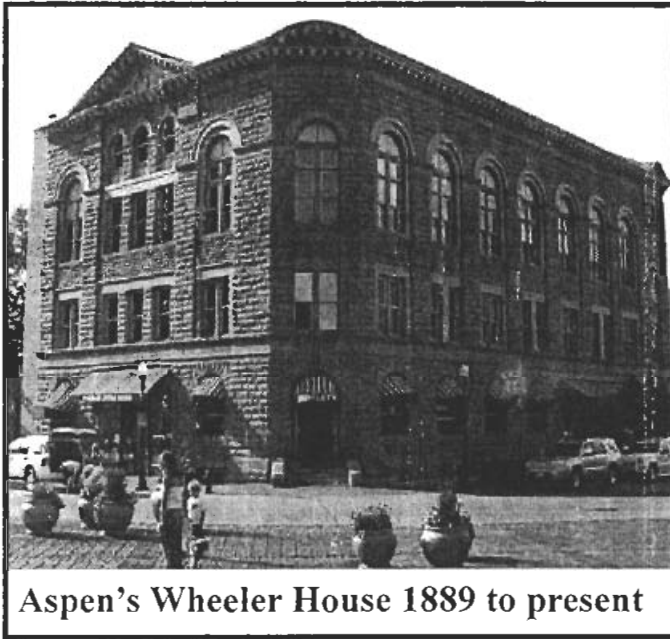
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ted the hinterland died as such and were converted to other uses. Others were torn down so, like Colorado Springs, a “real” center for the performing arts could be erected. During the 1960’s and 70’s many of the great houses fell to the likes of Urban renewal, modernization and the need for something a little more in tune with the time. It was an era where much of our historic past found its way to the modern dumps. This was not only true with the Opera houses but many historic buildings in general.



Aspen’s Wheeler House 1889 to present

The plethora of Opera Houses came about, I suspect, because of a few precious metal barons that wanted to at least appear to be sophisticated and had more money that they knew what to do with. The Wheeler Opera house in Aspen and the Tabor Grand Opera house in Denver come to mind. Both Wheeler and Tabor garnered millions of dollars in said precious metals that were wrenched from the ground by miners that were paid a dollar a day and damn glad to get it. In other places, the small towns, they erected buildings so that they could keep up with the Jones’ so to speak.

Although many of the buildings have been lost there are quite a few that still exist hidden behind different

marques, turned into bars, office buildings, hotels and in one case a lodge hall. Many of the national and international theatre troupes of the era played the houses in Colorado. Noted stars of the era preformed in the Gilbert and Sullivan operettas. The productions ran the gambit from high opera to farces (which were quite well attended). Some of the more noted productions were the *Patience* and *Pirates of Penzance* by the Denver Opera Company and a set of four *opéra bouffe* by the Soldene Comic Opera Company.

And our own west side was not left behind. What is now Meadow Muffins has had many evolutions during its life span. It was originally occupied by the First National Bank, a bicycle shop (Stewart and Tiger Bicycles) in the basement, and the opera house on the second floor. The third floor was a dance hall and boasted the finest dance floor in the state. Another iteration say it as Mack’s ice-cream parlor and confections in the basement and the Idle Hour Theater (vaudeville and, later, cinema) was on the first floor. In 1901 it was called the Waycott Opera House sometimes known as Mack’s Opera house located at 431 Colorado Avenue and was changed to 2432 W. Colorado Avenue in 1917 when Colorado Springs annexed the west side.



Waycott Opera House—now Meadow Muffins

Continued on page 5

Treasurer's Report

As I mentioned in last month's report, I would tell you this month about an exciting reprinting project that might also become a financial winner for our book store.

Two months ago we learned from a Society lifetime member, Curt Neeley that the still living Irving Howbert, grandson of the first Irving Howbert who arrived in Colorado City in 1860 with his father Rev William Howbert took his classic 300 page biography "Memories of a Lifetime in the Pikes Peak Region" out of copyright status. It was originally printed in 1925 was soon out of print, and then was reprinted on the 100th anniversary of the First National Bank, which Irving headed after he cast his lot with General Palmer and Colorado Springs. That book has also been out of print for 35 years.

We approached 93 year old grandson Irving who said he would be delighted if we, the Society, were to reprint the original book by his grandfather. And that he would be glad to write a new Introduction to our edition. He expects nothing in return.

With Leland Feitz's help we found a printer who would reprint that classic, and he contributed his copy so Morris Publishing could disassemble it to make the reprint like the original. Curt Neeley helped me get the book and forms ready.

So for the cost of only \$1,978, or less than \$6.60 a copy we will soon have 300 reprints of Howbert's original book, retaining the original 1925 photograph of Pikes Peak on the cover, and adding a formal portrait of Irving Howbert as he was, 5 times, El Paso County Clerk and Recorder – starting out in 1868 in our Bancroft Park Cabin!

Betsy Evans our Bookstore manager has set the price on this 300 page masterwork at \$19.95, with, of course 10% off for Society members. And because we will have an ISBN number and bar code on it, modern bookstores will be happy to carry it for a 40% discount. We can expect to clear \$3,000 from the initial re-printing.

We already have members asking to buy a copy when it is shipped, probably by May 1st. Grandson Irving Howbert will try to be at our center when we celebrate its arrival, and may be able to sign some copies!

Dave Hughes
Treasurer

For those that may be interested: through the acquisition of adelphia cable and internet provider, Comcast is now the cable and internet provider. This has caused a change in my email name and IP address I am now

westsider@comcast.net

Please make any appropriate change in you address book. Merv Casey, editor West Word

We are starting to plan for our 10th Annual Cemetery Tour at Fairview Cemetery which will be held in conjunction with Founders' Day in August.

Wanted: (1) a man to portray a Civil War Union veteran who established his home in Old Colorado City. Some knowledge of the War and military customs helpful. (2) A man to portray a Mayor (can be any age) and/or a younger man to portray a drug overdose victim. All biographical scripts will be provided.

Qualifications: Enjoys speaking to small groups without a script.

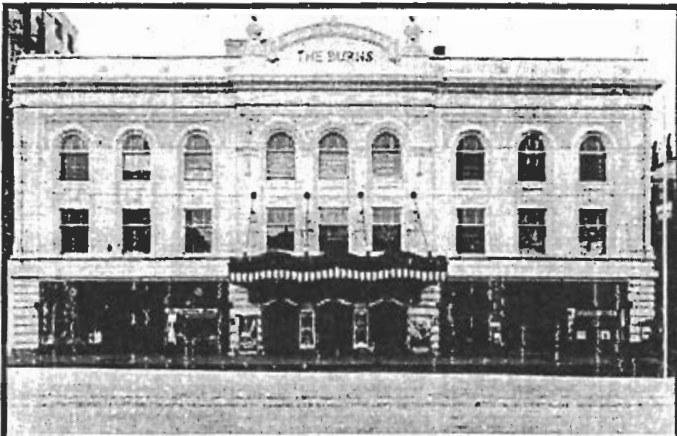
Pay: Lots of thank you's.

For more information contact Kay Atteberry, 599-3187 or Jo Cervone, 266-9096.

Lois Nadine Gilman

Nadine Gilman passed away on January 28, 2007. She taught music at School District 11 to retirement. She was a very active member of our Society. She served on our board, volunteered at the bookstore, gave programs and helped with our fundraisers. She oversaw our library accessioning our books and she trained a replacement to continue doing the job. Nadine was a very valuable member and we will miss her very much.

Nadine was born in August of 1938 in Illinois and moved, with her parents to Colorado Springs. She was a graduate of Colorado Springs High School in 1956 and received a Masters Degree in Violin from the University of New Mexico in 1961. She played with the Colorado Springs Symphony and was concert-mistress of the Colorado Springs Chamber Orchestra.



The Burns Opera House — torn down in the 1970's to make room for a wonderful asphalt covered parking lot and drive up teller window for the Exchange Bank

It originally sat a short two blocks directly north of the Colorado Midland Railroad Depot now gone of course, as is the railroad

In 1881 the Colorado Springs Opera House was erected at 18 N. Tejon. The then three stories cost some \$80,000, a considerable sum in 1881. It was considered one of the great Opera houses west of the Mississippi river. It became a vaudeville house in 1904 and was converted to a movie theatre in 1919 and showed many of the movies of our native son Lon Chaney who had worked as a stage hand when it was an Opera house. In subsequent years it functioned as a store front, a large Woolworth store that sported a soda fountain and now is a multi-plex bar called Rum Bay.

In 1912 the grand Burns Opera house was erected at the cost of some \$300,000 obtained from the digs in Cripple Creek. In 1928 it was converted to a movie theatre and renamed Paramount and then the Chief theatre. To me it was the finest building in the city and I spent many hours sitting in the balcony watching such thrilling movies as the "Fuller Brushman" starring Red Skelton, and Abbot and Costello in "Abbot and Costello meet Frankenstein" with Lon Chaney Jr. playing the Wolfman.

A SPECIAL PROGRAM

Friday, March 9th at 11 a.m. Bring your friends.
Refreshments.

"Film & Westside History: Remembering Lon Cheney" ~ Yes, Hollywood has ties to Old Colorado City! A star of over one hundred films, Lon Cheney was born and raised in this neighborhood. Come see this video about his life and movies – then stay for discussion and sharing memories. Bring a sack lunch if you wish...the program may last until about 12:30. Suggested program donation: \$2.

WHAT'S NEW IN THE BOOKSTORE?

Betsy Evans says, "Some of the newer titles - and more on order! "

"Faces and Places, The Valley and Beyond" by Leland Feitz, OCCHS member

"Calamity Jane: The Woman and the Legend" - for adults and older children

"Walking in Two Worlds" - stories of Native American women who were successful in both worlds

NOMINATING COMMITTEE ASKS FOR HELP!

It's that time of year to select new OCCHS Board members at the May 11th Annual Meeting. Those ending their two-year term are Kay Atteberry, Dave Hughes, Leland Feitz, and Mel McFarland.

Please call a committee member by March 15th indicating your interest in serving on the Board and/or give us your suggestions for members to contact.

Thank you.

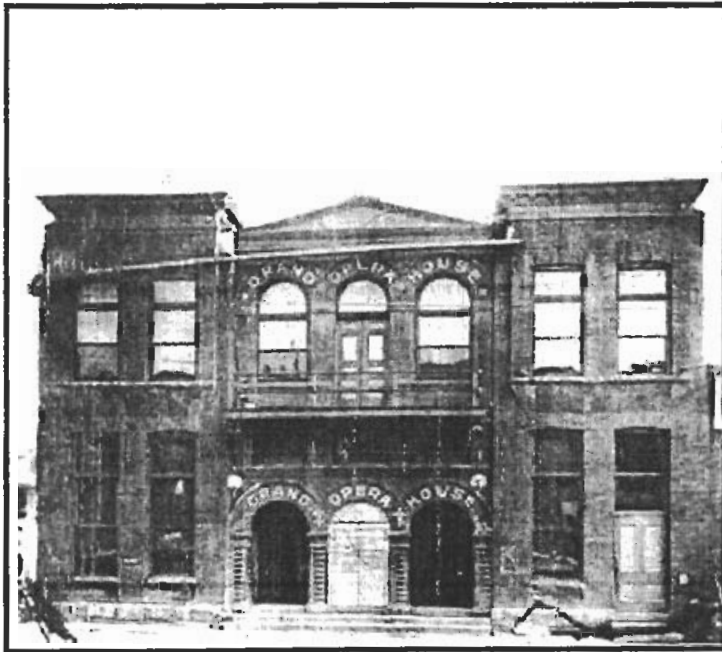
Joanne Karlson 475-2574

Elinor Messerschmidt 473-3692

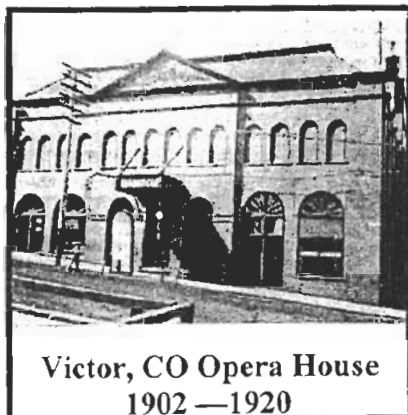
Sharon Swint 630-8384

In 1889 the Wheeler Hall, in Manitou Springs, was built by Jerome Wheeler another mining magnate who had built the Wheeler Opera house in Aspen. The Wheeler Hall was built as a detached three story structure with brick and stonework throughout which is still in existence. The ground floor was occupied by a dry goods establishment, the second floor was rented out as office space and the top floor with its high ceilings was the opera house. Around 1900 the building was turned into a hotel. In 1975 the new owners restored the building and preserved its historic character.

So maybe we westerners aren't as unsophisticated as many on the left and right coasts think we are, as we have a very long and illustrious past for enjoying the finer things in life, such as Opera and ice-cream.



The Cripple Creek Grand Opera House 1897 – 1907



Victor, CO Opera House 1902 — 1920



Denver Theatre—1861—1877 on the far right

1896 JULIUS CANN'S OFFICIAL THEATRICAL GUIDE 1896

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**Hand bill for a traveling
Opera Company**

Research assistance help needed at OCCHS

Through our internet site the Old Colorado City Historical Society receives requests for information regarding family members that once lived in the area, or requests for photographs about a particular house, or residence of a particular family, sometimes just general information about our area here on the west side.

There are four pending such requests that we could use assistance in doing some research with:

- 1 a conformation about James H. Graves and wife Letitia Graves
- 2 information regarding Carrie Alena Curran and Laurence
- 3 information re: the Goodrichm or Goodridge, or Goodrick family
- 4 information re: research of photographs of Emma Naylor Buck

We would appreciate any help from members in assisting with research on the above requests and/or others we may receive in the future. Contact Dave Hughs at the History Center or call him at 636-2040.

President's Message

We are beginning to plan for our coming year fundraisers: Our annual Victorian Tea will be held on Saturday May 12, on Mother's Day weekend. We are planning two settings this year.

Our Garden Fair will be Saturday, June 23 in Bancroft Park.

Territory Days Sat, Sun, Mon - May 26, 27, 28 - will be a three day affair with our booth and bake sale in Dr. Gavin's Cabin. Cookie bakers get ready. Our longtime Founder's Day celebration will be Saturday, August 11 in Bancroft Park, and then the next day Sunday, August 12 will be our annual Cemetery Crawl in Fairview Cemetery.

Our volunteers man all these events and we need plenty of help with all of them. Please make an effort to help with any or all of these events. Call me at my home phone 634-5023 or call the center 636-1225 to help.

The receipts from those events help keep our doors open. Please volunteer - we need your help.

Bev Disch
President



Paul Idleman Celebration

1949 - 2006

A Celebration and Remembrance of our friend Paul

Saturday, March 10 5:30 pm

Western Jubilee Warehouse, 433 E. Cucharas St.

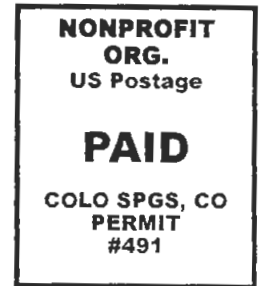
Colorado Springs, Colorado

Reservations appreciated... tidleman57@msn.com 719 686-0179

Music, Photography, and Shared Memories

Service, Sunday March 11, 10:00am
(meet at Pikes Peak Cog Railroad depot for train to Artist Glen)

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



HEARD BUT NOT SEEN

You have probably seen the results of the efforts of many of our hard working volunteers. Some you may see acting as hostesses, working at the bookstore, or attending to the many tasks required in the presentation of the programs we all enjoy so much.

There are, however, many volunteers who work behind the scenes and their efforts are not always visible.

One group of volunteers who are never seen at work is our wonderful Telephone Callers. These ladies, BARBARA BARBARO, LORENA BYMASTER, GEORGIA CROFF, MARTHA CURRY, LUCILLE DAMICO, ELIZABETH GROUT, AGNES JOHNSON, ENID KENNIS, EUNICE QUINN, ANITA SCHIMMEL, JOYCE SCHOEN, DOROTY VIDMAR, VERA WESTCOTT and NORMA ZACHARAKIS, call our members each month to remind them of programs and activities and provide information concerning the event. As a result of their work we have seen a significant increase in the number of people attending these programs.

The success of our History Center strongly depends on the number of people crossing our doorstep and these Callers share in the successful year we had last year.

We very much appreciate their efforts and offer our great thanks to these volunteers.