

George Birdsall

an unforgettable leader in Colorado City and Colorado Springs

by Barbara Barbaro and Paul Shepard

Many leaders of the Pikes Peak region started their careers in Colorado City. One of these outstanding leaders was George Birdsall. Some may have been more prominent but none were more dedicated than Birdsall. He was symbolic of the public servant working for his community

for little financial reward. He risked his life as a law enforcement officer, and volunteered his time for the betterment of the community for more than four decades.

Birdsall as a law enforcement officer

Beginning in 1900 and ending 1917, Colorado City and El Paso County saw George Birdsall as their primary law enforcement officer.

Birdsall was just a young man of about nineteen when he and a friend of his first came to Colorado. An ambitious man, Birdsall worked various jobs until he joined the Colorado City Fire Department in 1899. In the spring of that year he supposedly convinced the city council to appoint him marshal in addition to his job as the fire chief, all for a salary less than they would have had to pay for both positions. He later resigned as fire chief and held the position of marshal through 1906. In 1907 and 1908 he worked in the office of the State Treasury, and then in 1909 became the sheriff of El Paso County. He served as sheriff for the next eight years.

During the time Birdsall was marshal Colorado City was still establishing itself as a decent, law-abiding town. Its population was steadily growing. At the same time though, Colorado Avenue, the town's main street, was lined with one saloon after another, and the red light district, just one street south of its saloon



Special Collections, Tutt Library,
Colorado College, Colorado Springs, Colorado

George Birdsall, Early Law Enforcement Officer

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Old Colorado City Historical Society

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1 South 24th Street

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or Don Ellis - splderwort@pcsys.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:

Student	\$15	Lifetime	\$150
Individual	\$20	Business	\$50
Family	\$25	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.

WELCOME TO OCCHS!

~ NEW & RENEWING MEMBERS

Lewis Angel
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*An article in the last
 West Word may have
 left the impression that
 the only news coverage
 of the Sesquicentennial
 Founders Day
 celebration was by the
 Gazette. Actually, several
 publications provided
 coverage.*

Birdsall continued from page 1

row, was rowdy and out of control. It was the height of the gold rush period, and Colorado City played an important role in supplying equipment to the miners. It was the same time that armed troops set up camps in the city to protect citizens against violence during the union strikes at three gold processing mills near Colorado City. As sheriff, Birdsall saw Colorado City become a dry town in 1913, and then in 1917 he was there when it was annexed to Colorado Springs. He indeed, played an integral part in maintaining law and order.

Unfortunately, written records and documentation of arrests made under Birdsall's tenure as both marshal and sheriff are scarce. We do know, through various newspaper articles though, that Birdsall went to every extent seemingly possible to go after and get the bad guys. As an example, he once went out to Grand Junction, Colorado, to bring a Mr. Davis back to Colorado City. Davis had been charged with the theft of \$30 obtained by short changing a clerk in the post office just a few days before he took off for Grand Junction. Birdsall made it just in the nick of time, for Davis had just been fined for stealing a Kodak camera in that city and was just leaving the courthouse when he arrived. In yet another newspaper report, in December 1909 he traveled all the way to San Francisco to apprehend and bring back to Colorado a man named Edward Oakley, who was charged with passing a bad check on the Santa Fe railroad. Oakley had even gone so far as to enlist in the Army while in San Francisco in order to evade arrest, but it didn't help. He soon confessed and ended up in county jail.

A controversial man, Birdsall had his share of those opposed to his style and approach to law enforcement. The Colorado Springs Gazette and the Colorado City Iris were the two main newspapers in the local area at the time of Birdsall's incumbency both as marshal and sheriff. The Gazette in particular, did not like Birdsall and appeared to take every opportunity to criticize him whenever a controversial issue arose. According to the Gazette, Birdsall was far too lenient on the madams who ran their bordellos in the red light district. It accused him more than once of turning his head the other way as opium joints operated within an ear shot of the police station and confidence men and bunco steerers operated "without molestation" as they shook down their victims for thousands

of dollars. The local association of the Women's Christian Temperance Union was against him when running for office.

On the other hand, Birdsall was revered and respected by many. Just the mere fact that he was elected several times to the position of marshal and then sheriff, says plenty for the trust and support the local people had in him. In 1923 the Gazette was purchased by Clarence Hamlin, the owner of the Evening Telegraph. Hamlin had been a long time supporter of Birdsall and provided him more positive press coverage from then on.

In a paper presented to the Colorado Springs Ghost Town Club in April 1970, L. E. Ellinwood fondly recalls as a young boy growing up in Colorado City, and his impression of George Birdsall, who was a friend of his parents. Ellinwood wrote, "He was a small boy's ideal of a man who led an exciting and interesting life. I was sure for several years that I wanted to grow up to be a man just like him and devote my life to the same occupation. He rode about town on a beautiful bay horse. Strapped around his waist was a big revolver, the belt being full of bullets to use in an emergency. He was tall and thin with somewhat sloping shoulders, and wore a light-colored Stetson hat. Yes, he was a "good guy", the town marshal, and he commanded the respect, not only of small boys, but most of the citizens as well. I was indeed thrilled and pleased whenever he took the time to speak to me on the streets or while I was playing in the yard. To have George Birdsall know and recognize you was a real honor. At least this was true of all law-abiding citizens."

Birdsall as a community leader and businessman

After completing his last term as a local law enforcement agent, to support the war effort Birdsall went to work for the federal government in an agency that was a forerunner to today's Federal Bureau of Investigation. After World War I, Birdsall returned to Colorado Springs in 1919 and bought the Packard automobile agency. Shortly after that he added the Nash franchise to his dealership located at 13 N. Nevada. The Packard was a luxury car while the Nash was more of an auto for the middle class. He soon formed a partnership with Frank Stockdale, who had worked at Strang's Buick.

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During the following year Colorado Springs voters changed the city charter from an elected Mayor Council government to a City Manager form of government. Reformers around the country believed this type of government would eliminate big city bosses from politics. George Birdsall was one of nine members first elected in 1921 to this new type of council under which he would serve as a city councilman for the next 22 years. In this system a president and vice president of the council were chosen by the other members rather than by the voters. In 1925 Birdsall ran for re-election. The terms were staggered with three members elected every two years. After each election the council chose a mayor and vice mayor.

The 1925 election was one of the most controversial in the history of the area. In 1924 the Ku Klux Klan took control of the Governor's office and won majorities in both houses of the legislature. The Klan had an ambitious legislative agenda and thought they had the votes to implement it. However, Senators L.A. Puffer and David Elliot, two fiscally conservative Republicans from El Paso County who were chairs of the Finance and State Affairs committees joined forces with Democratic

leadership and killed all but one minor KKK bill. This infuriated John Locke, the Grand Dragon of the Klan according to Robert Allen Goldberg in his book, *Hooded Empire: The Ku Klux Klan in Colorado*. The Klan decided they had to take control of politics in the one major city in Colorado that was anti-Klan. They decided they would win the 1925 City Council Election and recall Puffer and Elliot. The incumbent members of council up for re-election were the Mayor Ira Harris, Walter Drake, and Birdsall. The KKK candidates were G.W. Bartlett, T. F. Rudy, and Frank Seeley. Six hundred Klansmen came from other parts of the state to campaign for their candidates. When the votes were counted the three incumbents were reelected with Birdsall getting the most votes of all the candidates. After this election the Klan began losing political power throughout the state and soon disbanded. According to Goldberg the Colorado Springs City Council election was the beginning of the end of Klan power in Colorado.

Birdsall would win re-election in 1931 and 1937 much more easily than in 1925. When Mayor Harris died in 1927 the vice mayor was elected to be the president of the council and

Birdsall was elected to be the vice president of the council. Two years later he was elected president of the council, meaning he was mayor. Every two years for the next 14 years he was chosen by his fellow councilman to be mayor. He served as the political leader as the small town became a city in the 1940's.

Years later when asked what was the greatest achievements of Colorado Springs during his time as an elected official he said the most important was the development of water supply on the north slope of Pikes Peak. He believed a city could not grow



Special Collections, Tutt Library, Colorado College, Colorado Springs, Colorado

George Birdsall (far right) standing next to Herbert Hoover

without adequate water. He also believe the city's venture into public ownership of utilities was essential because it helped pay for the water. Both projects were funded through bonds so no tax increase was required to pay off the debt. Among other achievements cited by Birdsall were oiling of the streets, construction of a sewage disposal plant, and the development of public parks.

In 1954 the North End Power plant was dedicated to and named after him. Two years later on August 29, 1956 George Birdsall died after a long and debilitating illness. Upon hearing of his passing city Mayor Harry Blunt praised Birdsall saying no other individual has done more for the city of Colorado Springs.

Ellinwood, the young boy who so vividly remembered Birdsall as a marshal, ended his paper with these touching words about Birdsall. "He was an outstanding figure in the west. His life exemplifies the dramatic story of what is possible for a young ambitious man to accomplish in America, if he has the determination to make good. He started out as a messenger boy in Denver, later a grocery clerk. He accepted almost any kind of work until he was hired as fireman in 1899 and then policeman in Colorado City in 1900. From then on for almost half a century he was in public service in important offices in the Pikes Peak region and had an important part in shaping the policies which helped to make the community a desirable place to live today."

(Information for the portion of this article on Birdsall's career as a law enforcement officer was extracted from the book, "Law and Disorder in Colorado City", written by OCCHS member Barbara Barbaro and co-author of this article.)

WANTED: YOUR E-MAIL ADDRESS

Your Society needs to continue to compile the email addresses of all members who have such. We already have, and use the email addresses of nearly 100 of our members. As our printing and mailing costs keep going up sharply we need to be able to send announcements, renewal reminders, and encourage members to use our new web site to buy our books and gifts and renew their memberships. Member Diana Hughes may be calling you to ask for your email address and explain how we limit the distribution and use of our list.

~GIVE A GIFT OF HISTORY~

- ♦ book or CD from OCCHS Bookstore & Gift Shop
- ♦ 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 in the Old Colorado City Historic District
- ♦ personalized commemorative brick on History Center patio



~for prices and information~
Bookstore now online
history@oldcolo.com
or call the Bookstore (636-1225)

In Memory of Charles "Chuck" Geiss

Chuck Geiss passed away on September 17, 2009 after an extended illness.

Chuck's work as a project engineer took him to England and elsewhere around the world. In New York he met his future wife, Liz. He and Liz, retired to the Old Colorado City neighborhood in Colorado Springs and became members of OCCHS. Chuck was also an active member of two bowling leagues, played the piano and sang in his church choir.

Liz creates many of the exhibits at the History Center.



Rescheduled

Victorian Buckram Frame Hat Making Workshop

Build Your Own Victorian/Edwardian Hat!

Saturday, October 17, 2009

At the History Center

9:00 - 4:00-ish

Cost \$48.00

Every person will build a women's or men's buckram frame Victorian hat - one of 14 different Denise Nadine pattern styles.

Basic sewing skills required.

The Instructor is Denise Winter. Denise has been making her own hats for many years and has a line of hat making kits and patterns.

Visit www.denisenadinedesign.com to view hat styles and select your design.

Advance reservations required by October 5th. Call Jo Cervone, 266-9096, for more details.

~Denise will also be donating an original beautifully decorated hat for our Annual Banquet Silent Auction in October~

From the President's Desk~

Already it is the end of summer and time to look forward to fall activities. If you haven't visited the History Center for awhile, you will see the Fremont Experimental Station exhibit displayed on the new RED wall! We hope you like the background for the many black and white photos. You will find some new faces as well as familiar ones who have been volunteering this September. We thank you all, including those names I may have overlooked! My apologies.

Suzanne Schorsch is our new Museum Bookstore & Gift Shop manager. After eight years, **Betsy Evans** asked to reduce her workload. We are thankful that she will continue sharing her expertise ordering books and working with authors and publishers. Good job, Betsy! Suzie will be in the Bookstore most Tuesdays...a good time to come in to meet her...and shop! Suzie brings her many talents and skills in retail sales and office management to OCCHS. **Rebecca Clark** completed the transition of the book inventory and bookkeeping to a computer program.

Meanwhile, we keep the doors open because **Bev Disch** schedules all the Bookstore volunteers. September volunteers were **Art Crawford, Muriel Dunkley, Betsy Evans, Sandy Hanzilan, Marge Knorr, Kathy McBride, Phil McDonald, Suzanne**

Schorsch, Paul Shepard, Norma Stull, Judy Willey, and Eloise Wynne. Bev also sees that WestWord is mailed with the help of Kay Atteberry, Muriel Dunkley, and Eloise Wynne.

In the Collections and Archival Department, you will find Barbara Barbaro, Liz Gelss, Martha Lee, Dave Murray, and Jerry Travers on Tuesdays, and on Thursdays, Tom Hendrix and Paul Shepard. The archival and photo digitization project is moving forward with David Hughes III, Don Kallaus, Gerry Travers, and Dave Murray.

Also on Tuesdays, Janice deChadenes and Judy Willey are supervising Goodwill volunteers helping with landscaping and maintenance.

Our "handymen" are Art Crawford, Tom Hendrix, Werner Karlson, Dave Murray, and Curt Neeley along with others who help set up for programs. Marge Knorr is the Kitchen Chairman nagging us to keep the kitchen clean!

Elaine Radney completed a research request. The Research Library is used frequently with the help of Kathy McBride. A valuable and useful research collection was donated by Ralph Conner.

Members of the OCCHS Board and artist, John Jackson, attended a City Council meeting when the City presented a resolution accepting the Sesquicentennial monument.

Eric Swab presented the first OCCHS fall program. Many first time visitors to the Museum have come to see his exhibit (see September WestWord article). Many compliments!

Jan deChadenes, Sharon Swint, and I attended a Coalition of Pikes Peak Museums meeting held in Victor at the Lowell Thomas Museum.

Cub Scouts from Howbert Elementary toured the museum exhibits, the monument, and Garvin Cabin led by Joanne Karlson.

Dave Hughes presented a program at the Palmer Lake Historical Society.

Sharon Swint spoke about the History Center at the quarterly Colorado Springs Visitors & Convention Bureau volunteer meeting.

Sandy Hanzilan, Betty Baker, and Sharon Swint have been planning the annual dinner and auction. Merrell Folsom is the speaker.

Phil McDonald organized the members' trip to Fort Union and Glorietta Pass.

Jo Cervone and husband created the scarecrow decorating the outside the building. She writes media releases for our programs and events.

Kenyon Jordan continues regular coverage of Old Colorado City history and events in his weekly newspaper, Westside Pioneer.

Kay Atteberry, Barbara Barbaro, Jo Cervone, Don Ellis, Kathy McBride, Phil McDonald, Mel McFarland, Paul Shepard, and Sharon Swint brainstormed programs and events for 2010.

Betty Baker and Gordon Gray keep the membership roster up-to-date. Please let us know if your address has changed or you are not getting your issues of WestWord!

And last, but not least, Don Ellis creates each issue of WestWord. We applaud his talents!

Thank you everyone

—Joanne Karlson

Treasurer's Report September, 2009

After we netted \$2,279 for our Founders Day our Fairview Cemetery Crawl did well too. We took in \$1,375 for that 4 hour outdoor good-weather event. It was undoubtedly helped by the added publicity surrounding our Colorado City Sesquicentennial history events.

Hopefully we can entice our members to purchase more from our Book and Gift Store for Christmas this year. We never have done Christmas book sales as well as we should be able to, even though our History books which range from \$3.00 to \$40 are excellent Gifts. If purchased online we can ship to any US address. Just go to our web site <http://history.oldcoloco.com> select the 'Book Gift Store/Tickets' item on the home page. You can page through pictures of the cover images as well as the price of all 245 of our books, then securely buy them by means of your credit card or a Paypal account. Our software will calculate the sales tax, if any. Out of state addresses pay none, outside Colorado Springs residents only pay state sales tax. You can select either to pick up your order at the History Center or have it shipped for a \$5.00 shipping fee.

With six \$150 Lifetime memberships added this year, all of which money goes into our Fixed Endowment fund - that fund has reached \$91,050, while our accumulated 'Eamed Interest' - from our endowment investments has reached \$10,873. Under our Bylaws these earnings from the Endowment may be expended by the Board as needed to cover current expenses. It will be used before the new year to upgrade the basement Archive rooms' electrical service for about \$1,700. We may replace our aging front door, with its worn down crash bar mechanism, compatible locks, and security system. That may cost up to \$1,000. Then we may have to replace the 2d old furnace in the basement. Our replacement of the first one cost \$2,710 last year. So we may have to deplete our \$10,000 savings by over \$5,000 by the end of the year.

As reported last month, in order for your society to try and earn much more than the very low 1.8% interest offered by the Pikes Peak - or any other local - Bank, we purchased a \$50,000 5.75% interest Revenue Bond. We added a second \$25,000 6.27% bond in September. Our remaining cash savings of \$25,000 we have left for now in the low 1.8% interest-rate Bank Savings Account. All together that \$100,000 of our savings is earning us nearly \$5,000 annually - which is half of what it costs us a year to 'keep the doors open' - utilities, security, communications, trash, wastewater, janitorial, insurance.

I project that, if our last 2009 fund raising event - the December Bed and Breakfast tour - earns at least \$1,500, and we spend what I have outlined above for building maintenance, we should end the year with \$102,000 in our total savings accounts, \$5,000 in our checking account, and at least \$1,000 remaining in our bookstore account to start out the new year. Things are tough economically all over, but we are holding our own.

Dave Hughes, Treasurer

OLD COLORADO CITY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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OCTOBER CALENDAR

Celebrating 160 Years of Colorado City History (1849-2009)

Thurs., Oct 1

6:30 to 9 P.M.

Annual Dinner: "An Evening in the Wild West"

at Ghost Town Museum, Hwy. 24 & South 21st Street.
Catered by Front Range Barbeque.

Program: "A Comparison of Two American Frontier Heroes:
Abc Lincoln and Kit Carson" presented by member, Merrell
Folsom Silent auction. Casual or Western dress.

Dinner reservations by Saturday, Sept. 26. Members \$19, Non-
members \$24. Guests welcome. Reservations by phone or
website (credit card), or in person at History Center (check,
credit card or cash).

Friday, Oct. 9

11 AM

Program: "The Early Days of Palmer Lake"

Presented by Victor Valle and members of the Palmer Lake
Historical Society. A look at the families, economy and unique
history of this area of northern El Paso County as told by
longtime residents.

Saturday, Oct. 17

9 to 4 P.M.

Hat Making Workshop: Victorian Hats & Red Hats!

Instructor, Denise Winter, back by popular demand.

Contact History Center or email jocervone@comcast.net for
registration, costs, and list of supplies

NEW Museum Hours: Tues. thru Sat., 11 - 4 Free Admission.