

WEST WOOD



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Henry Clay Childs The Spiritualist Founder of Crystola, Colorado

By David Martinek

He was a complex man, educated, successful in business and a wealthy toy maker in Chicago in the 1860's. He was a supporter of Abraham Lincoln and served in the Illinois legislature. He was elected twice as the speaker of that state's House of Representatives.

And, Henry Clay Childs was also a spiritualist.

Spiritualism, a belief that communication can be had between the living and the dead, developed and reached the peak of its popularity from 1840 through 1920, particularly in English-speaking countries. By 1897, there were rumored to be over eight million followers in the United States, Britain and Europe, mostly drawn from the middle and upper classes.

Ironically, the vast majority of followers were intelligent, educated people who believed that the spirits of the dead, residing in the spirit world, were able to communicate with the living and that anyone could receive spirit messages. The standard way of receiving these messages was through formal sessions, called seances, where a medium, a person acting as a spiritual advisor, would translate information from any spirits contacted - messages about everyday life and the afterlife.

Many prominent figures of the time were spiritualists, including Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, author of the Sherlock Holmes detective novels, and Mary Todd Lincoln, who organized a seance in the White House while grieving the death of her son Tad. That seance was also attended by her husband, the president. Despite being fraught with numerous instances of fraud and outright chicanery, the surge of interest and

curiosity in spiritualism increased during and after the Civil War due to the massive number of casualties.

It was in this environment that Henry Clay Childs developed his interest in spiritualism and the occult. After his business was reportedly wiped out during the Great Chicago Fire of 1871, Childs was persuaded by a local psychic to start over in Colorado. He and his wife Catherine settled in the Ute Pass area in 1872 to homestead in a valley known as Trout Park. He built a white frame house, ran a few sheep and cattle, and started a lumber and milling business nearby.

According to various writings, Childs and his wife entertained visiting mediums in their home and often held seances with their friends. It was during one of these seances, legend holds, while gazing into their crystal ball, that a spirit told Childs that there was gold in the area. After that, Childs divided his time between his business and prospecting.

Childs is credited with discovering gold in the Cripple Creek area in 1878 after visiting the region, according to a story published in the June 1900 *Denver Ores and Metals*. "On returning to his home, he became satisfied that the region was mineral-bearing and worth development. He built a laboratory and began the study of metallurgy and mineralogy.

After careful exploration and repeated tests he became satisfied of the true character of the district and announced his belief that not only the section in his immediate vicinity, but that the entire Pikes Peak volcano contained

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Old Colorado City Historical Society

'Preserving the past for the future'

1 South 24th Street, Colorado Springs, CO 80904-3319
http://www.occhs.org (719) 636-1225

WEST WORD

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or Don Ellis - spiderwort@pcsys.net

SUBMISSION DEADLINE IS THE 15th OF EACH MONTH

MISSION

Revised August 2012

The Old Colorado City Historical Society is a nonprofit volunteer organization established to recognize the historical significance and unique culture of original Old Colorado City and early El Paso County which includes the present and future history of today's greater Westside neighborhood.

This organization perpetuates the preservation and display of artifacts and archival materials, encouragement of research, education of the children and the community, through the membership and the operation of the Old Colorado City 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	Business	\$75
Individual	\$25	Lifetime	\$250
Family	\$35	Life plus one	\$300

Funds from a Lifetime membership are placed into an Endowment Fund to be used only for projects 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	Sharon Swint	630-8384
Vice President	Betty Baker	636-1225
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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. Everyone welcome.

WELCOME TO OCCHS! ~ NEW & RENEWING MEMBERS

Betty Gene Baker

Dorothy Borst

John Chatfield

Sallie & Wellington Clark

Karen Converse

Tom and Carol Daniels

Barbara Downs

Pat Ebersole

Graham Hatfield

William Haynes

Pam Hines

Jean Hughes

Bill and Jeanie Redding

Steve Shepard

John and Carol Stoodly

Gerald Travers

Jane Atkins Weiss



Childs continued from Page 1

immense gold ore deposits.

He was later helped along with his belief of gold in his "immediate vicinity" by a visiting medium, Professor L. J. Kimball, who claimed he could "witch" gold. Supposedly, Kimball located a number of metallic deposits up and down Ute Pass with his willow stick. Kimball persuaded Childs and several of his spiritualist neighbors and friends to form the Brotherhood Gold Mining and Milling Company in 1897. According to Jan Pettit, author of *Ute Pass, a Quick History*, what followed was one of the most notorious stock selling schemes ever to happen in Colorado - where more money was invested with no return than in anywhere else in the region.

Several examples of low-grade ore were found, either through actual exploration or "with the help of an accommodating wizard" who would gladly save a prospector the trouble of locating a mine by divining the spot of a future bonanza, upon payment of a "sufficiency of cash in advance."

Convinced there was gold in his own backyard, by 1899 Childs and his fellow spiritualists reorganized the company into the Crystola Brotherhood Town, Mine and Milling Company. The town was called "Crystola" in honor of Childs' belief in crystal ball gazing and spiritualism. They converted a former boarding house, a large stone building, into a storage place for all the gold they were going to find. Excitement was high, tunnels were dug and a large (cyanide) processing mill was built in a nearby canyon. The gold fever, spawned by the millions being made in the Cripple Creek and Victor gold district, also prompted the Green Mountain Falls Town Company and folks in Woodland Park to join with Childs and his company, and "money began to pour in from hopeful investors."

As the town grew, it built its own small railroad station next to the tracks of the Colorado Midland that had come through in 1887. There was also a grocery store and a post office (called Langdon) to accommodate the growing community. A little later, Crystola built a primitive water system and a school. Apparently, shares in the town company were sold all over the United States.

No gold of any consequence was ever found.

The Crystola Cyanide Mill was in existence from 1901 to 1914.

According to historic letters, the milling

equipment was tested but never used, and was later repossessed. The storage facility, waiting to be filled with all the gold they had seen in their crystal ball, or witched by their "accommodating wizard," was eventually torn down and a barn was built with the lumber. Adding to the misery, Childs' wife died, leaving him a lonely and disappointed widower. According to one writer, he became a recluse and developed a rather fond taste for "Duffy's Malt Whiskey."

And yet his widespread reputation, due, no doubt, to the far-flung promotion of Crystola, remained intact. In 1905, shortly before his death, the *Kansas City Star* ran an article about Childs, calling him the "Tolstoy of the West" - reflecting perhaps on Childs' adoption in later life of the fervent pacifist ideals of Leo Tolstoy, in such works as *The Kingdom of God within You*.

When he died, Childs was cremated in Denver, as he had requested - in the cheapest way possible. His obituary, published in the *Denver Republican* in February of 1910, stated that his "wife died several years ago." His only known living relative was a sister, Mrs. Ella Parmalee Biddle of Florida. But, "his last words were a command that she not be notified of his death." Supposedly, his ashes and his crystal ball were buried beneath a tree near the white frame house in Crystola that he built in 1872.

Throughout his life, Childs' belief in Spiritualism never faded. Upon his death, he willed 2,000 acres of land in the Crystola area, valued at \$25,000, to be used to build a school of Spiritualism - the "first of its kind in the country." The Reverend Hiram Vrooman, a psycho-scientist, author of *Religion Rationalized*, and head of the Liberal Congregation of Denver and the Correspondence School of Rational Religion in Portland, Oregon, attempted to establish a psychic research school at Crystola in accordance with Childs' wishes.

With the gold fever over and the renewed promotion of the area by Vrooman as an Utopian center for Spiritualism, Crystola continued to grow. By 1915 it had twenty cottages and one hotel (the Hotel Abbott).

For more than fifteen years, Reverend Vrooman sponsored summer lectures in Crystola, invited visiting spiritualists, promoted the area as a tourist destination, sold lots, rented camping spots and hotel rooms, and offered shares in the Crystola Cooperative Association (billed as an industrial cooperative - a "fraternity"). But there is no record that a school was ever established.

"The story of Crystola," wrote Rose Mansfield Pike in her 1952 *History of Crystola*, "is the story of a dream world that was built on faith in visions of gold; visions that never came true." The *Colorado Springs Gazette Telegraph* once wrote that ghosts and goblins roamed the canyons of Ute Pass and that Henry Clay Childs conferred with them often about where to find gold. Perhaps they were all dreaming.

Afterword:

Joseph Thibodeau was a French Canadian and an old spiritualist friend of Childs, and one of the original directors of the Brotherhood Gold Mining and Milling Company. In 1921, eleven years after Henry Clay Childs' death, he came down the lane one day to the home of 6 year old Robert Freeland, whose family lived in the house Childs built in 1872.

The Freeland's ran a dairy on the place. Robert recalls Thibodeau saying to his father: "It's time to dig up Childs' ashes and I'm supposed to scatter 'em in front of the white house on the garden." Robert remembers standing by a tall tree while his father and Thibodeau dug up a small can of ashes and watched him spread the contents around. They never found the crystal ball.

A note from the author: I sincerely appreciate the cooperation of the Ute Pass Historical Society for allowing me access to all their historical files about Crystola. In reading the literature, there are obviously many stories that could be written about the place. I have concentrated on the founder, Henry Clay Childs. He was a most interesting man. -DM, August 2011

Sources: *Colorado Springs Gazette Telegraph*; *Denver Ores and Metals*; *History of Crystola* by Rose Mansfield Pike, August 18, 1952; Letter of Edwin S. Bower, September 20, 1958; *Mountain Echo*; *Ute Pass-Route of the Blue Sky People* by Virginia McConnell; *Ute Pass-A Quick History* by Jan Pettit; *Ute Pass Courier*; Ute Pass Historical Society; Wikipedia.

NOTE: This story was previously published in the newsletter of the *Ute Pass Historical Society & Pikes Peak Museum* (www.UtePassHistoricalSociety.org) It is reproduced here with permission of the author.



Program: Ute Indian Prayer Trees of the Pikes Peak Region

Presented by John Wesley Anderson

September 13th

Ute Indian Prayer trees are fascinating living artifacts that serve as a link back in time to the Ute Indians who lived in the Pikes Peak Region and cultivated these amazing trees, primarily for spiritual and navigational purposes. The presentation will focus on how to identify the five known types of Ute Culturally Scarred Trees and where these Ute Indian Prayer Trees can still be found today throughout the Pikes Peak Region.

OCCHS Members FREE - Non-members \$5

September 21: John Wesley Anderson will lead a hike to see some of these trees in Fox Run Park.

Cost \$5 -- Reservations required

(contact our bookstore)

The Old Colorado City Historical Society
presents the 16th Annual
FAIRVIEW CEMETERY CRAWL

Saturday, September 14
10 A.M. to 2 P.M. (last tour star at 2:00)



Meet

Anthony Bott
Blanche Burton
Laura Belle McDaniel
Jacob & Bertha Schmidt
Birdie Stapleman
David Moore
Rev. Duncan & Katherine Lamont

\$8.00 (\$10.00 at the gate) Children 12 and under free.

Get tickets at the Old Colorado City History Center or by calling 636-1225 with your credit card

Our thanks to Blanches Place (www.blanchesplace.com) for helping to sponsor this year's Cemetery Crawl.

October program:

RANGER DAVE'S COLORADO TRAIL BACKPACK in PHOTOS and MUSIC

In 2010 and 2011, Ranger Dave (Dave Van Manen) backpacked the Colorado Trail to raise funds for the Nature Education programs that the Mountain Park Environmental Center provides. October's entertaining program offers: History of the Colorado Trail; Slide show of gorgeous scenery; Hiking stories from the trail's 486 miles; Live music by Ranger Dave, performing some of the songs he kept himself company with on the many solo miles of the trek.

Dave Van Manen is the Founder and Director of the Mountain Park Environmental Center (www.hikeandlearn.org). Through the Mountain Park Environmental Center, Dave provides opportunities both "behind-the-scenes" and "in the field" for people of all ages and backgrounds to experience the wonders of Nature. Dave is a naturalist, writer, reader, avid hiker and backpacker, and always a student and lover of nature. Dave is author of *Plants of Pueblo Mountain Park Foothills and Montane Flora of Colorado's Southeastern Mountains* and a recipient of the Enos Mills LifeTime Achievement Award for Environmental Education.

The program will be Friday, October 11, 2013 at 11:00 A.M.

OCCHS members FREE - non-members \$5

Ramona

by Sharon Swint

Little known even to Westsiders, is a town that was established for one purpose - alcohol! Although always known as the "wild side", Colorado City voted in 1913 to try and become more respectable by going dry. Not wanting to loose their livelihood, forty-nine "wets" banded together and established the town of Ramona. It consisted of a dairy, jail, athletic club and a few other businesses, but mostly saloons - including the Heidelberg Inn. The main street of Ramona, Colorado was today's 24th street next to Thorndale Park off Uintah Avenue. The Heidelberg Inn was on the east side of 24th.

OCCHC has recently received a safe from the Heidelberg Inn as a donation from the Swint family--David, Sr., Sharon and David, Jr. It once held the money made selling "demon rum". The Inn not only served liquor but included an attractive restaurant. The restaurant is known to have used Van Briggie pottery to serve its patrons.

The hastily established Ramona lasted only 3 years. The United States passed a national prohibition on the sale of alcohol in 1916. A farewell dinner for the town of Ramona was held on Thanksgiving of that year. Time passed in Ramona, foundations fell, grass and weeds grew everywhere and on April 1, 1947, residents of the area voted 46-4 for disincorporation, ending a little known bit of Colorado history. OCCHS now owns a piece of this history. Please come by and take a look at the old safe.

GETTING A "NEW" LOOK WITHIN THE MUSEUM

by Joanne Karlson

Who are those people moving displays around? Hanging "new" pictures? Asking questions in Archives and Collections downstairs?

The answer is "five members of the newly-formed Exhibits Committee" learning planning creating, and setting up displays.

With the revised Mission Statement including local history beyond 1917, we are looking to expand our collections and exhibits into more recent times. All of this comes with the help of Tom Daniels and Miki Knudson in Archives and Collections to find what we already have.

If you went to school or have lived on the Westside for awhile and have some memories to share, please contact Joanne, Tom, Miki, Kathy McBride, Shirley Ewing, Jay Hatfield, or Marilyn Lee. Topics might be a 1950s/1960s teenage hangout restaurant on West Colorado, the potato chip factory, or school histories. We look forward to your feedback.



Jay Hatfield (left) and Marilyn Lee putting final touches on their new exhibit

President's Letter

Dear Members--

When I began to write my presidents letter a week or so ago, I intended on sharing with you some maintenance issues at the History Center. I had begun to notice that we had items that needed attention and some daily maintenance that should be handled. As the saying goes, "Make plans and watch God laugh."

The rains came and we had a mess. On the south and east side of the building the gutters were clogged and we had Niagara Falls. Water was coming in through the walls, down the stairwell to the basement into several rooms, into the old photo darkroom and more. Sand bags that Susie Schorsch and I hauled didn't stop anything. Tom Daniels and Miki Knudson mopped up seven gallons of water from the Boy Scout room in two days. Charlie Patterson unclogged our gutters and that helped BUT our Archival materials and artifacts were and still are in serious danger. We did not qualify for any flood money from the government nor did our insurance cover the damage.

The good news is that my husband, Dave Swint and Miki's husband Leo Knudson, stepped up. They both have a lifetime of engineering and construction experience. They have presented to the Board of Directors a plan to fix our immediate needs and some long term plans that can wait just a bit. This work will use up some of our savings but they will be financially responsible. I trust them both.

This old lady that is our museum home needs a lot of love if we are to continue to use her as a museum. As the work begins, I will keep you informed. Not being able to reach high ceiling light bulbs will just have to wait. Please pray for a little less rain and a lot more energy for our board.

Any extra help you might give us would be appreciated.

Sharon Swint

Treasurer's Report

Suzanne Schorsch

The middle of the year has come and gone and as is the norm, the Old Colorado City Historical Society runs in the black the second part of the year.

We thank all of our members for their continued support.

Total Checking Account	\$ 21,523.56
Endowment Account	\$104,268.30
Savings Accounts	\$ 16,566.01
Bookstore Account	\$ 3,711.74
Total All Accounts	\$146,069.61

Gain Year To Date: \$775.60

The Old Colorado City Historical Society's Board of Directors meets regularly on the third Monday of the month at 1:00 P.M. at the

Old Colorado City History Center, unless otherwise announced.

Interested visitors are always welcome at the Board meetings.



**The next Board meeting will be Monday, September 16
at 1:00 P.M. at the *Old Colorado City History Center***

OLD COLORADO CITY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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September/October Calendar

Friday, September 13

11 A.M.
(Doors open at 10:30)

Program: **Ute Indian Prayer Trees of the Pikes Peak Region** presented by John Wesley Anderson. Ute Indian Prayer trees are living artifacts that link back to the Ute Indians who lived in the Pikes Peak Region. The presentation will focus on how to identify the five known types of Ute Culturally Scarred Trees and where these Ute Indian Prayer Trees can still be found today throughout the Pikes Peak Region.

OCCHS Members FREE. Non-members \$5.00

Saturday, September 14

10 A.M. to 2 P.M.
(last tour begins at 2 P.M.)

Fairview Cemetery Crawl - Meet interesting characters from Colorado City's colorful past

Adults \$8.00 (\$10.00 at the gate)

Children 12 and under FREE

Saturday, September 21

9:00 A.M.

Hike: **Ute Indian Prayer Trees** in Fox Run Park led by John Wesley Anderson.

\$5.00 Reservations required (Contact our bookstore for reservations.)

Friday, October 11

11 A.M.
(Doors open at 10:30)

Program: **Ranger Dave's Colorado Trail Backpack in Photos and Music** presented by Dave Van Manen. This program offers: History of the Colorado Trail; a slideshow of gorgeous scenery, hiking stories from the trail's 486 miles; and live music by Ranger Dave, performing some of the songs he kept himself company with on the many solo miles of the trek.

OCCHS Members FREE. Non-members \$5.00

Old Colorado City History Center

1 S. 24th Street, Colorado Springs, CO 80904 - (719) 636-1225 - <http://www.occhs.org>

Museum Hours: Tues. thru Sat. 11 - 4 Free Admission. Donations greatly appreciated.