

Volume 15 Issue 1

Summer 2016



# Oak Creek Connection

HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
OF OAK CREEK & PHIPPSBURG

## LANDSCAPING



We call the educational outdoor extension of the Tracks and Trails Museum the “Coal Miners’ Bucket Park”.

This downtown focal point is getting another upgrade, thanks to a grant awarded by the Routt County Museum and Heritage Fund and funds from the estate of Evelyne J. Nordheim.

The landscaping project will enhance the historical park by stabilizing the hill behind the miners’ wall to create a low two-tiered retaining wall.

The bottom portion will stretch behind the Miners Wall to the side entrance of the museum. The second tier will be half the length and be located near the museum.

By designing the retaining wall as a low, two-tiered step allows for displayed mining equipment to be moved to sit along the bench. This will provide for better utilization of space in the lower portion of the park.

When the ‘old and frail’ mining equipment is relocated, safety issues will also be ad-

dressed. Much of the equipment is heavy and awkward and will be better secured once repositioned and reassembled.

This phase of the project will be completed by Labor Day Weekend when the official dedication of the Fire Truck Structure will be held.

The second phase of landscaping planned start for 2017 will include indigenous plants will complete the Bucket Park projects.



## Events Kick-Off Spring

The Women’s High Tea was held on the first Sunday in May. Much to the delight of the 80 women in attendance, Mary Brassell presented an engaging program with examples of historic aprons.

Next the ladies visited over tea and a wide variety of edible delectables. Kate Krautkramer read a moving piece she had written on Evelyn Pidcock and Margaurite Nelson. It was followed by Irene Hoff playing the piano.

The afternoon ended with the last call for the silent auction, acknowledgement and a verse of “God Bless America” accompanied by Andy Shaffner.

Right: 2016 Global Youth Service Day

**Global Youth Services Day** brought around 20 Soroco Middle School students to the Museum to make an impact.

To keep students productive, mulch was donated by Wal-Mart with Steamboat Ace Hardware supplying \$160. worth of needed tools, paint, and supplies.

In a flurry of accomplishment students washed windows, pulled weeds, laid mulch and cleaned the grounds.



The 112th, **Pioneer Picnic** was held on June 5th at the Soroco High School Commons. Musician Gene Sanders played the piano as guests visited and enjoyed a meal together.

This annual event rotates every two years through out the county to return to South Routt in 2019 and 2020.

The Pioneer Picnic developed out of early 4th of July celebrations. The first recorded picnic held on July 7, 1886 in Steamboat when the county boasted of a whopping 763 residents and extended to the Colorado/Utah border. It became the social event. By the 1900s the Pioneer Association was formed and the first official Pioneer Picnic was held in Hayden June 14, 1904.

# ALL'S WOOL THAT ENDS WOOL—FIELD TRIP

An Oak Creek caravan of cars, and 15 people in them, meandered to historical points of interest on May 11.

A detailed tour and question/answer session was provided at each stop during the day by docents and owners of the various historical properties.

- ◊ The Hayden Granary was recently placed on the National Register of Historic Places. Although the Wild Goose Coffee & Bakery in the old feed store is new, the rest of the property is original.
- ◊ The Hayden Heritage Center, in the former railroad depot, explores the history of West Routt County.
- ◊ The Yampa Valley Fiberworks Mill and Gift Shop demonstrated the complicated process of taking raw wool and turning it into a variety of specialty yarns. (It was also a great place to enjoy sack lunches.)
- ◊ The Marcia Car is the detailed, elegant railroad car on display in the city park in Craig,
- ◊ The Museum of Northwest Colorado in Craig, housed in the former Colorado State Armory, celebrates farming and ranching with its high quality displays.
- ◊ The Wyman Museum, near Craig, is a living museum with an eclectic presentation of hands-on displays.

## COME AND PLAY THE MUSEUM GAME OF CLUE

Six museums are participating in an interactive game of CLUE. The rules are as follows:

**Ages:** Youth to Seniors

**Number of Players:** Undetermined

**Playing Time:** Present to August 24

**Equipment:** Car, maps, pencil, score sheet, eyeglasses (optional)

**Object:** Test your ability as a sleuth to determine who killed Mr. Smith.

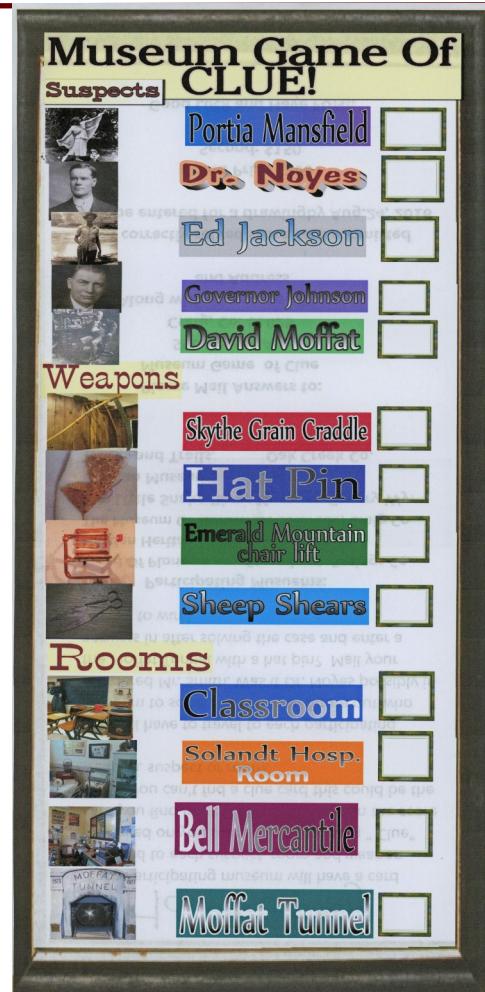
**Location:** Tread of Pioneers in

Steamboat Springs, Hayden Heritage Center, Museum of NW Colorado & Wyman Museum in Craig, Little Snake River Museum in Savery WY, and Tracks and Trails in Oak Creek.

Pick up a clue card at the first museum to use throughout the game to locate the weapon, suspect, or room.

Was it Dr. Noyes in the Moffat Tunnel with a hat pin??

Each correctly solved score card will be entered in a drawing. Grand Prize is \$200 and Second Prize is \$150.



## Historic Newspapers On-line

The entire existing collection of *Oak Creek Times* and *Yampa Leader* from their inception to closure in 1944 is available for research at: [www.coloradohistoricnewspapers.org](http://www.coloradohistoricnewspapers.org)

Prior to February 2016, both newspapers were available through 1922. Thanks to a joint effort with Tread of Pioneers Museum in Steamboat Springs, funds became available to

complete the project.

The Colorado Historic Newspapers Collection represents over 200 newspapers published primarily from 1859 to 1923.

Search by paper title, date, location, or even subject or name.

The past is just a link away!

# Mining History Inside The Museum

"Along about 1916 my dad, J.C. Groesbeck, and I worked for the coal company located a few miles below the town of Oak Creek. I believe it was the Edna Mine..."

The coal was mined on top of the mountain and let down to the tipple on the railroad by cable car. The cars ran on two parallel tracks at each end of a hoist arrangement whereby, when a full car was let down, it pulled the empty car up. We were paid by the tonnage."

Edward B. Groesbeck

*Oak Creek Memories II*

Oak Creek was known for its many surrounding coal mining camps and company towns, from one-man wagon

mines to corporate operations, and Tracks and Trails Museum has hundreds of archival photographs and physical items that define mining life.

The coal mining display offers a sampling of the collection. Photographs of Edna, Pinnacle, Moffat, Keystone, Juniper, Haybro, and smaller mines show more than the external entrances and tipples.

They graphically depict the miners stooped in small passageways, covered in black soot, setting explosives, using pick and shovel,. They pose with friends, sometimes entire shifts, reflecting the comradeship among the mostly immigrant, miners from approximately 26 different

ethnic groups.

Historical artifacts represent the common equipment the miners used including a variety of hard hats, lunch buckets, tools, mining law books, clothing, and safety lamps.

## Did you know that:

- ◆ John Crawford arrived in 1876 as one of the first interested in mining coal
- ◆ Railroad tracks arrived in 1908
- ◆ Local miners became involved in the strikes of 1913/14
- ◆ Underground mines began closing in early 1940s
- ◆ First strip mine opened in 1949

## Imagine a Coal Mine as an Underground Town of Men and Mice

"Watching coal miners at work," as George Orwell once wrote, "you realise momentarily what different universes different people inhabit."

Miners drove main tunnels through hundreds of feet of rock. If the tunnel plunged vertically, it was a shaft; if it dipped at an angle, it was a slope; if it was horizontal, it was a drift.

Maps (many available in the museum) lay out underground space strangely resembling an underground town. Entries were the main avenues, side shafts were side streets, rooms and pillars were the city blocks. Support systems threaded through the grid—tracks, air pipes, pumps, fans.

Sometimes crawling on their stomachs, sometimes working in the earthen rooms, miners determined how they

would extract the coal –using picks followed by cartridges, they would work through the smoke and dust using crowbars, shovels, and even bare hands to pack their cars tightly with several tons of coal, then push the cars along tracks to the side entry.

Miners were paid not for their time but for the ton, the amount of coal they

had extracted. So early miners gambled with their lives.

Miners had a bit of protection by watching the reactions of mice, fine tuning their sense of smell and hearing, and even watching the flames in their lamps.

They fed the mice because, even better than canaries, the mice could sense danger or quickly die from methane gas. Bad air (stinkdamp, blackdamp, and afterdamp) were all named by their odor and were lethal.

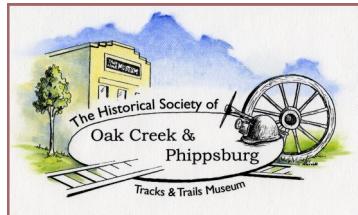
Hearing a few pebbles fall, or a timber creak could put savvy miners in motion to protect themselves.

Brave men are honored on our Miners Wall in Bucket Park.



Left: Moffat Mine, George Hartman, about 1910-13

**HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
OF OAK CREEK & PHIPPSBURG**



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*The Historical Society of Oak Creek and Phippsburg is a nonprofit organization incorporated in 1998 and dedicated to preserving the history of the Upper Yampa Valley, especially Oak Creek, Phippsburg, and the Stagecoach area.*

- ◊ *Tracks and Trails Museum emphasizes coal mining and railroad history with strong emphasis on the people who developed the area. Hours are 10 a.m.-12 p.m. and 1-3 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday. Call ahead for seasonal closures and changes.*
- ◊ *The Outdoor Mining Display next to the museum in Oak Creek and the Railroad Display in the Phippsburg Community Park are open daily.*
- ◊ *Volunteers meet every Wednesday at 10 a.m. in the museum. Projects vary. Other volunteer opportunities available.*
- ◊ *Current officers: Betty Sweetland, president; Mary Mayer, vice president; Chuck Keating, secretary; Nancy (Babe) Peckham, treasurer; Nita Naugle, curator; Donna Peters, newsletter editor.*

## **Curator's Corner**

The Tracks & Trails Museum is funded by your memberships, donations and a county mil levy that was passed in 2003 to support the museums. This mil levy is based on property tax revenues. For the last four years the amount we receive has decreased and this year is no different. In 2013, we received around 36K and in 5 years we are approximately half that. Rising utilities, maintenance, fees, professional services and salary for one part-time employee comes out of that as well as other budgeted items. We now have three buildings that we maintain as well as several outdoor exhibits.

During the 2016 planning process my thoughts lead me to these questions: Are we building an organization that will last? Are we laying the foundation for sustainability and growth?

I feel the urgency to address these questions sooner rather than later. My goal is to put into place a long term plan for sustainability. Items that will be addressed by the Historical Society will be membership levels, membership base, fundraising strategies, and progress measurements. We will look at our options—like setting up an endowment fund. And we will explore the different ways that you can gift; like giving from your IRA, real property, bequests and charitable trusts.

Seeing what we accomplish, what we contribute to the community and knowing your past financial and moral support and how proud I am of our past and present volunteers and what they give of themselves to collect, preserve, protect, interpret, impart and celebrate the history of the Oak Creek, Phippsburg, and Stagecoach areas. That dedication and foundation is the reason I want the Tracks & Trails Museum and Historical Society to last for generations!

Nita Herold Naugle, Curator

## **Odds 'N Ends ...**

- Check out our facebook page, where we keep you updated with our current events and share historic photos.
- Mark your calendars: Open house & reception for the 1937 Fire Truck Structure on the Friday of Labor Day Weekend—Sept. 2nd.
- ... also lots of other activities sponsored by Historical Society on that weekend. See you in Oak Creek!
- Help keep our doors open. The Tracks & Trails Museum is looking for volunteers and docents to greet visitors. One shift a month is just 2 hours.
- In 2015, the Tracks & Trails Museum had over 1800 visitors and 46 plus requests for information and research.
- In 2015 volunteers contributed over 2000 hours of service through events, museum staffing, cleaning, maintenance, archiving and more.
- Dust off your albums and shoe boxes of photos we are looking to add to our collection.