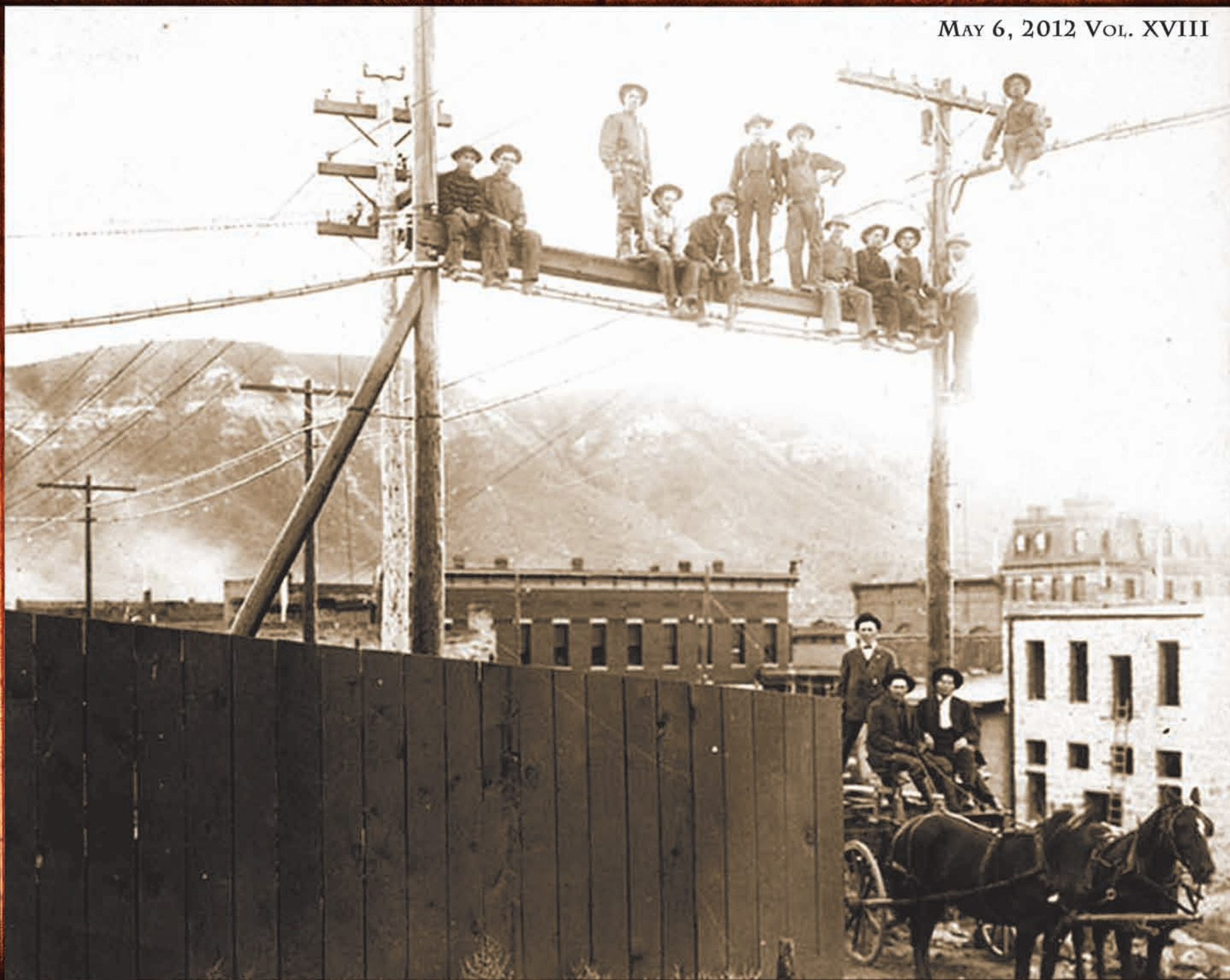


HISTORY LA PLATA

A PUBLICATION OF THE LA PLATA COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

MAY 6, 2012 VOL. XVIII



WORD UP: COMMUNICATION IN LA PLATA COUNTY

KSUT

FOUR CORNERS PUBLIC RADIO

The Southern Ute Tribe was one of Indian radio's earliest pioneers. One of only eight tribal radio stations in the country, KSUT went on the air for the first time on June 14, 1976 as a communications service for the tribal membership. The programming line-up offered Ute language and cultural programming, personal messages, traditional Native American and popular music, and community news.

A growing demand for public radio in the region presented an opportunity for KSUT. In 1984 its board of directors moved to expand its broadcast area and become a National Public Radio and American Public Radio affiliate, offering programming that would attract local listener and business support outside of the reservation.

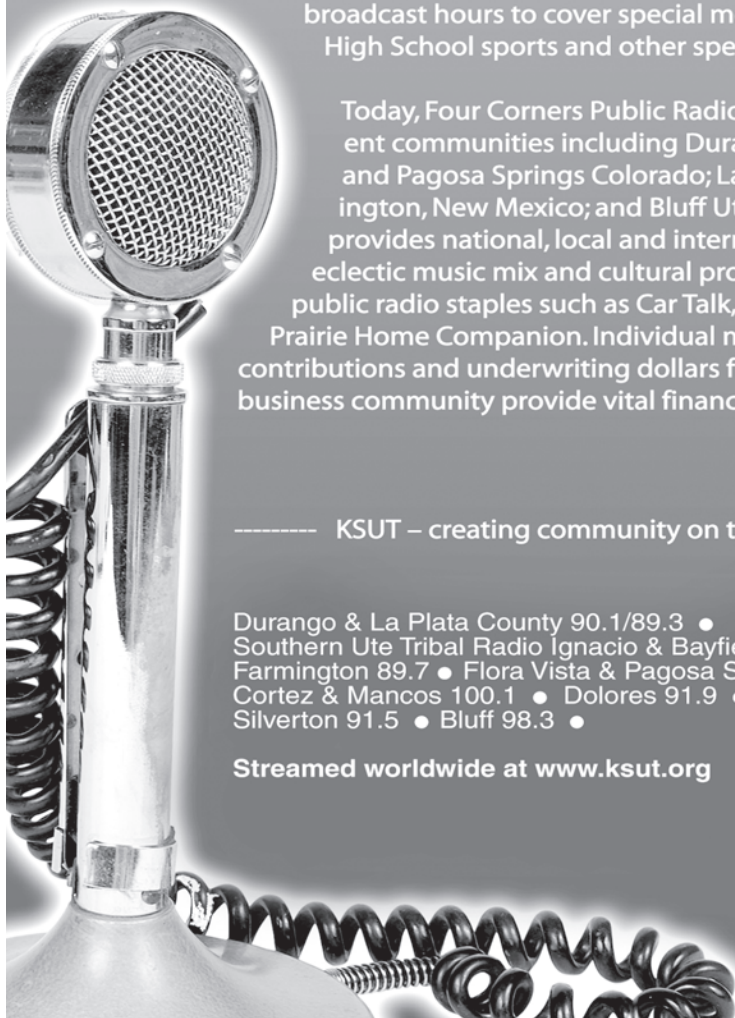
While the station's success as a regional public radio service was apparent, its original goal had lost its emphasis. In June of 1998, KSUT returned to its roots by starting Southern Ute Tribal Radio, a second radio operation that better reflected its original mission. Southern Ute Tribal Radio currently operates simultaneously with the Four Corners signal, 5 days a week on 91.3 FM, with additional broadcast hours to cover special meetings, Ignacio High School sports and other special events.

Today, Four Corners Public Radio serves 14 different communities including Durango, Silverton and Pagosa Springs Colorado; La Plata and Farmington, New Mexico; and Bluff Utah. The station provides national, local and international news, an eclectic music mix and cultural programming – plus public radio staples such as Car Talk, Fresh Air and A Prairie Home Companion. Individual membership contributions and underwriting dollars from the local business community provide vital financial support.

----- KSUT – creating community on the air -----

Durango & La Plata County 90.1/89.3 ●
 Southern Ute Tribal Radio Ignacio & Bayfield 91.3 ●
 Farmington 89.7 ● Flora Vista & Pagosa Springs 88.1 ●
 Cortez & Mancos 100.1 ● Dolores 91.9 ●
 Silverton 91.5 ● Bluff 98.3 ●

Streamed worldwide at www.ksut.org



FROM THE DIRECTOR

Carolyn Bowra

“Watch out!” While not long in explanation, that is an example of one aspect of communication – to warn. Communication can be practical; the exchange of information necessary to accomplish daily tasks. Communication can also be social; an exchange of ideas, an expression of affection or emotions, a means to motivate or even control.

Over the years, the means of communication may have changed, but communication itself has not. The social aspects of communication are the root of a community. We talk to one another. We read the newspaper. We tell stories. At the Animas Museum stories are our lifeblood. Whether it is the recollections of a homesteader or an amusing anecdote from last Thursday, we are all about the stories. The artifacts in our collection help tell our stories. Without those stories a museum is a warehouse. The stories bring life to the humblest object, as it links us to our past.

We would also like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who helps us tell those stories. Generous citizens have donated so many wonderful artifacts for our permanent collections, and shared their family history and stories. Collections volunteers have spent thousands of hours over the years cataloging and researching those items. Interpretive volunteers have worked tirelessly to tell the stories to visitors, or place the items in exhibits. Volunteer researchers and authors have written the stories for this, and other publications. This team effort brings the past to life and helps us keep La Plata County history and culture alive for present and future generations.

The La Plata County Historical Society welcomes you to its annual publication, as we communicate about communication. We hope you are inspired to learn more about our community and seek an opportunity to discover the stories of your family and friends.

Employees

Carolyn Bowra, LPCHS/Animas Museum director
 Jan Postler, curator of collections
 Brianna McCormick, museum assistant

Board of Directors

Jennifer Stollman, president
 Kathy McKenzie, vice-president
 Marie Roessler, secretary-treasurer
 Jeanne Brako
 Jeff Johnson

George Hozier
 Marilee Jantzer-White
 Yvonne Lashmett
 Bruce Spining
 Duane Smith (emeritus)

Museum Hours

10 a.m. - 5 p.m. Monday through Saturday (May – October)

10 a.m. - 4 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday (November- April)

The Animas Museum is located at 3065 West 2nd Avenue in Durango on the corner of 31st Street and W. 2nd Ave.



Animas Museum staff, from left to right: Carolyn Bowra, Brianna McCormick, Jan Postler



Upcoming Events

There is always something happening at the Animas Museum!

Saturday, May 12 Mother's Day at the Animas Museum's Joy Cabin: Drop by between 10-2 for "Cabin Tea Time" and experience a Victorian Era tea service, as it would have been in early Animas City. Kids can create a special Mother's Day card to take home.

Friday, May 25 Community Heritage Awards: Help honor Diane and Fred Wildfang and the La Plata Electric Association for their contributions in preserving the heritage of La Plata County. The gates open at 5:30, dinner is served at 7:30. Tickets are \$40 each and may be purchased at the Animas Museum, 3065 West 2nd Ave. Tickets may also be purchased by phone (970-259-2402) or on-line at www.animasmuseum.org.

Saturday, June 9, 10:30 a.m.: Join us at Greenmount Cemetery for a tour of the Catholic section of the cemetery. Wear comfortable shoes, and bring a water bottle as we hear the stories of early settlers in this historic setting.

Saturday, July 14, 10-2: Mosey to the museum for some western style living history at "Cowboy Camp". Visitors can try their hand at roping and other cowboy skills, as well as sampling some of the cowboy grub, cooked on a campfire. Yee haw!

Monday, July 30, 7 p.m.: Join us for an evening of weird and notorious tales from the history pages of the San Juans, presented by Colorado authors Charmaine Ortega-Getz, author of "Weird

Colorado" and Carol Turner, author of "Notorious San Juans." These are the yarns that don't show up in the "regular" history books. Presented in partnership with Maria's Bookshop

Saturday, September 8: Activities for Animas City Day will take place at the museum and around the area of north Durango that was Animas City. Also that day the museum will host the Animas City School Reunion for former students who attended school in the building that now houses the museum. If you, or someone you know, attended the Animas City School in the two-story stone building please be sure the La Plata County Historical Society has your contact information so we can send your invitation to this special gathering.

Saturday, October 13, 1-4: Observe Durango Heritage Celebration with demonstrations of ladies' hat making.

Friday, December 7, 5-7: Begin the holiday season with a sneak preview of the Holiday Craft Bazaar, then relax by the fire in the 1870s Joy Cabin. Enjoy refreshments by lamplight, Christmas carols and historic ambience!

Saturday, December 8, 9-3: Holiday Craft Bazaar: The solution to all of your gift giving dilemmas will be under one roof as area artists and crafters offer their best wares for sale. From jewelry to baked goods, there is sure to be something for everyone.

New Exhibits at the Animas Museum

The staff and volunteers at the Animas Museum have been busy updating exhibits. With over 35,000 items in the permanent collections, it is no small task to select artifacts for exhibit. The 10th anniversary of the Missionary Ridge wildfire will be marked with the opening of a new exhibit "Forged by Flame." The exhibit will explore how fire, both urban and wildland, have changed La Plata County. Firefighting tools from yesterday and today will show the role technology has played in fighting "the fire fiend."

The museum will host a traveling exhibit, Water 2012, from May 14 to May 26. Water is said to be the most valuable resource in our state. The exhibit will explore the role water plays in Colorado's growth. Photos from the museum archives will show the roles the Animas River has played in generating power, supporting agriculture and providing recreation. The exhibit will also feature a series of images showing the

destructive power of water from historic floods.

In June the Animas Museum will present a showing of quilts from the permanent collection, many of which have never been exhibited before. "Quilts: Where History Meets Art" will explore the role quilts have played in the history of La Plata County. In addition to being a functional item to keep family members warm, quilts offered an opportunity for their creators to make an artistic statement or to commemorate a special event or relationship. This rare opportunity to see the museum's quilt collection is not to be missed.

"Fe-males: Pumping Iron" showcases many of the "labor saving" devices the women of La Plata County have used over the years. Many of the tools are indeed made of iron and serve to show the hard work that was done in the home, and in the case of Olga Little's burro shoes - outside the home.

PRESIDENTS MESSAGE

Jennifer Stollman

Welcome to History La Plata's 2012 issue! This year's theme is "Word Up: Communication in La Plata County." It is only fitting that this year's edition would celebrate and examine the historical legacy of communication in La Plata County. We live in a world where we can contact each other across the globe and into space and where in an instant we can connect professionally and personally through our cell phones and the Internet.

The speed of communication has had a correlative effect on how we live. Life moves more quickly and we are inundated with information and communication that overwhelms our senses. What a perfect time to take a moment to study and contemplate our history of La Plata County and its forms of communication. Across the historical landscape, communication has been a vital element of our county's inhabitants.

As you read this year's articles you will learn that La Plata County has had local, national, and international relationships with communications. This year's authors describe the historical importance of the telegraph, Fort Lewis' heliograph, our county's relationship with the trans-Atlantic cable, the vital role played by radio station KDUR in delivering local and distant information, how public and private communications assisted in the development of our county, the role of quilts and other commemorative forms of communication, our connections with local and distant worlds, and the ways in which improved communications fostered positive relationships between the county's diverse populations. As

you read, you will understand that because of our unique geographical and somewhat isolated location, our people utilized traditional forms of communication and developed innovative forms of communication to suit our public, professional, and personal needs.

The La Plata County Historical Society members and the Animas Museum staff and volunteers are dedicated to the project of history—its research and dissemination. We understand that only by studying our county's history can we know who we are as individuals and a community. Whether you have just arrived to our space or claim a generational legacy, we are all citizens of our county. Understanding our history strengthens our ties to the land and each other. Throughout the year, the historical society promotes a love of history through exhibitions, events, and informational campaigns. We are so very fortunate to be in a place replete with history. You cannot take a footstep in any of our fine towns or rural areas without encountering marvelous historical stories. Our ancestors shared space to survive, be productive, and to thrive. Reading about their history provides us with strategies of success and camaraderie that we can implement in our daily lives.

So, please enjoy the efforts of our members and take a step back into La Plata County's history. While you are thinking about history, consider bringing your friends and family to the Animas Museum. We have marvelous permanent and new exhibits, lectures and events designed to ignite your love of history and steep you in our rich historical tradition.

On the cover: "Telephone crew at work on the east 100 block of 11th Street, Durango in June of 1908. *Photo Courtesy of The Animas Museum Photo Archives*

Word Up: I comprehend what you are saying and verify that your statement is true my good brother. *From the Urban dictionary, an online resource.*



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EARLY COMMUNICATION IN LA PLATA COUNTY

THE OLD SPANISH TRAIL : Communication on a Mule Train

by Douglas M. Knudson

Dear Sister,

Since my last letter to you, we've added two sons and a new baby girl to our family. Juan helped build the first church in our village, where the priest baptized the children. Now, he's working on a little school building.

Several neighbors disappeared in the flood last year but we live on higher ground. We're now growing oranges—what a luxury! ... How are things in Santa Fe? ...

A letter like this from California in 1847 might take two or three months to get delivered. No roads—just faint horse and mule trails—connected California with New Mexico.

No trucks, no trains, no airplanes carried goods; no telephone lines, no Internet provided communications across the land. Someone who moved west from the island of Spanish civilization in northern New Mexico basically severed ties with the home folks.

Some of them tried to send messages via the annual caravans that brought woolen goods made in New Mexico to the California coast. Those horse and pack mule caravans (no wagons) sometimes brought new settlers to the Los Angeles area. They provided 3-month-old news from Santa Fe, Abiquiú, and Taos.

Communications by Early Native Traders

Trade didn't start with the Spanish. Communications of tribes with each other had been going on for centuries. Shells and beads brought from California centuries ago are on view now in Taos Pueblo and Southern Ute museum collections.

Some Utes traveled portions of these unnamed routes for centuries. They carried



This modern map of the Old Spanish Trail shows its route through today's La Plata County.

Map courtesy of the Old Spanish Trail Association

fine tanned leather westward to California, east to the Mississippi, south into Central America and north onto the cold plains.

The tribal traders were the newsmen of these early centuries. They traveled lonely routes. They seemed eager to share news and stories with the different tribes and clans who fed and hosted them, eagerly listened to their tales

The Spanish Connection

In 1598, Spanish colonists moved into the area of the Ohkay Owingeh (San Juan Pueblo, New Mexico). After ten years of makeshift arrangements, they moved to a new site and called it Santa Fe. Farmers and ranchers scattered through northern New Mexico supplied this small town and a few others. Their "news" came from Mexico City

by priests and pack mule caravans; it arrived every year or two.

Spanish kings banned trade with any country but Spain or New Spain. That made New Mexico a small island of Spanish people in a vast sea of land occupied by Native Americans. Only 170 years later Spanish settlers moved from Mexico into California. Priests from southern California and northern New Mexico tried to connect the colonial outposts in 1776, but didn't make it.

Only in 1821, after Mexico freed itself from Spain, did legal and profitable trade with people from Missouri start on the Santa Fe Trail. Then in 1829, young Antonio Armijo headed west from Santa Fe, with some guidance from trappers, Navajos, and Paiutes. His 30 New Mexican men and 100 loaded mules emerged from the great desert (Mojave) to the east, startling Alta California officials and the 2,000 citizens of Los Angeles.

They brought woolen goods made in New Mexico from fleece of Spanish churro sheep (now called Navajo Churros). They traded blankets and serapes for surplus mules and horses that were consuming the pasturage of the California cattle ranches. When Armijo's men arrived in Santa Fe, they found that Missouri traders were eager to pay high prices for the big mules.

Until 1848, one or two caravans per year headed out to California, using two

alternative routes easier than Armijo's. Most of them followed what became the "main route," which crosses the Southern Ute Reservation and all of La Plata and Montezuma counties. Their trading boosted the economies of both California and New Mexico.

After learning of the warm climate, hundreds of New Mexicans and Anglos also took the trail to settle in California. Many of them became key leaders in the Los Angeles basin.

The Trail's Name

When John C. Fremont encountered the main route in southern California in 1844, he recorded the joy of "following the Spanish Trail," going eastward. That name in his widely read book soon appeared on maps and other books.

After 1848, when a U.S. and Mexico treaty transferred the Southwest to the United States, this trading route became less used. The stories and importance of the Old Spanish Trail began fading into history. However, some emigrants, such as Josefa Moya Young, continued traveling the old trail back and forth to visit relatives in New Mexico and Colorado.

Over time, parts of the routes were graded and paved as county and state roads. In other places, new property owners built fences, making some segments inaccessible to travelers. (About 40% of the route crosses public lands.)

Then, in 2002, U.S. Senator Ben Nighthorse Campbell, of La Plata County, guided the Congress and the President to officially designate the "Old Spanish National Historic Trail," as the nation's 15th such route.

This historic trail now reminds us that, even without instant communication gadgets, people traveled long, hard, slow routes to connect with others and to trade goods for their mutual benefit. We have also learned from our Ute friends that this trading trail has been used for uncounted centuries.

For more information visit:
www.oldspanishtrail.org.

.....
Douglas M. Knudson is a professor emeritus at Purdue University. He resides in South Fork, CO and is active in the Old Spanish Trail Association.

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EARLY COMMUNICATION IN LA PLATA COUNTY

NATIVE AMERICAN FLUTE MUSIC: The Courting Language of Love

by Marilee Jantzer-White

Sporting a finely carved animal, its spotted sand painted body a composite of lizard and weasel with what appears to be a turtle's head, this flute recently acquired by the La Plata County Historical Society's Animas Museum is definitely worth your visit. The entire length of the flute is richly embellished with carved and painted decoration. Twelve alternating bands of black and red accented with sunburst patterns decorate and define each of the six air holes. In addition a painted crescent moon at the flute's far end is flanked by two enigmatic blue circles, echoed in the next segment by two corresponding red circles attached to the skeletal framework of a tree. As individual expressions of their owners, no two flutes are the same and tribal traditions did not dictate uniformity in aesthetic appearance within tribal societies.

Flutes have a long history in the Americas. The earliest examples found thus far are from the Southwest, dated around 620, and currently reside in Tucson's Arizona State museum. In pictographs and petroglyphs flute players, associated with proper rituals for growing corn, attest to the ubiquity of the flute's presence throughout the Southwest. Yet Native American flutes were common across North America and their usage has been documented in fur trappers' accounts, settlers' diaries and the journals of military expeditions. The flute of the Americas differed from the European flute, however, in that it was outside the western diatonic system of major scales. The recent acquisition by the Animas Museum of this Ute Mountain Ute courting flute exemplifies a musical instrument that, in many tribal societies, was used primarily for courting.

Each courting flute is unique to its carver, routinely male, and owned throughout his life. Some were even handed down, father to son. Cedar wood was, and is, the most common

medium, as seen in the museum's acquisition, but a variety of other woods as well as eagle bone could also be employed. Many courting flutes were crafted to resemble the long neck of a bird, with the sound emanating from a beak shaped end. Carved animals affixed to the flute by rawhide were common features on courting flutes. Frequently the human body served as a template for the overall measurements used in designing a courting flute, and determined the flute's length, its distance between finger holes and distance from the playing end to the first air hole. But first and foremost courting flutes were about function, used to assist in winning the favor of the woman chosen.

In an autobiography dictated in 1833, the Sauk leader Black Hawk provides an engaging account of the courting flute's magic in action. During community feasts where everyone dressed in their finest, the flute owner selected the woman he wished to court. The girl's mother was informed and arrangements were made for him to visit the girl that night. She may accept or reject him, and signaled her intent by snuffing out the candle or light he carried. If rejected, at daylight he would draw on the power of his flute. When a woman passed he would alter the flute's tune waiting until the one he desired passed: he then resumed with his own personal courting tune. That evening the ritual would begin again and usually ended with favorable results. While slightly different variants on the details of courting rituals exist, all partake in a similar magic. Each relies on the flute's power to summon a spirit for the desired task, to convey the language of love, a language unique to each individual courting flute.

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Marilee Jantzer-White is an art historian and an emeritus professor at Fort Lewis College.



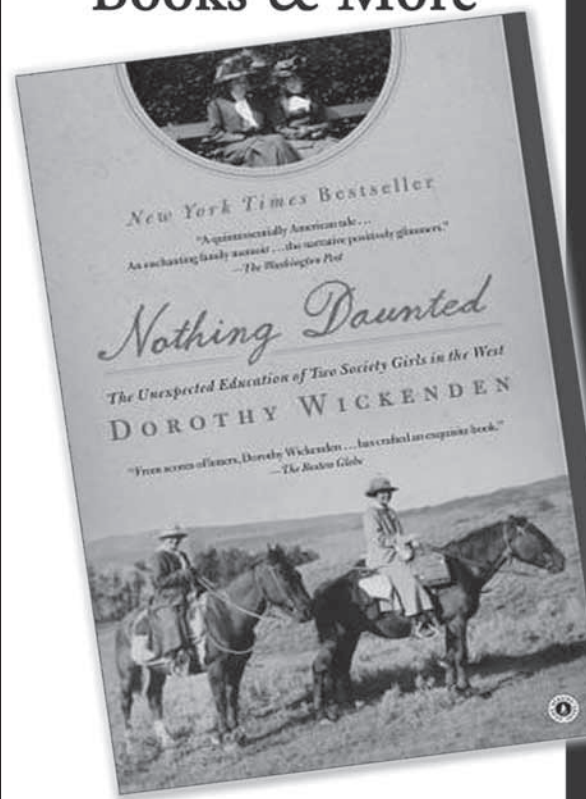
The carved animal on the stem of the Animas Museum's courting flute is a composite representation of a weasel with a turtle's head and a lizard's tail. These animals, attached by strips of rawhide, could be moved to tune the instrument. Photo: La Plata County Historical Society

Animas Museum Develops Volunteer Program

Through generous funding by the Ballantine Family Foundation and the Community Foundation serving Southwest Colorado, the La Plata County Historical Society and Animas Museum hired a museum consultant, Peggy Zemach, to help develop the museum's volunteer program. The funding helped make possible a volunteer recruitment event,

which placed several volunteers in the collections and education departments. In addition, Peggy developed a "Volunteer Handbook" to serve as a guide for volunteer recruitment, placement, training and recognition. For information about volunteering, contact Director Carolyn Bowra at animasmuseum@frontier.net or call 970-259-2402.

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EARLY COMMUNICATION IN LA PLATA COUNTY

COMMUNICATION WITH SUNSHINE

by Duane Smith

"It was a flashing light," some worried locals claimed. News quickly reached Fort Lewis, then located along the La Plata River southwest of recently settled Durango. Fortunately, the commanding officer knew what it was. A new invention to send messages over long distances, the heliograph, had come to the Four Corners area.

It was a simple device, using mirrors to send signals by flashes of sunlight, as in the case of Fort Lewis, or by using flags or torches. Typically, the sender used the Morse code. The idea had been developed early in the 19th century, but it was not until about 1869 that the British devised the apparatus for use in military operations.

The United States military, in 1880, established a line of heliographs between Forts Keogh and Custer in Montana, a distance of 140 miles. At the same time, a message was sent over 200 miles, from New Mexico to Arizona. That proved exciting news to scattered posts throughout the West.

Finally, it was possible to signal troops in the field or isolated posts that did not have the telegraph. Troops campaigning out of Fort

Lewis fit the first use perfectly as they rode west into Utah.

The post was actively involved with this communications marvel. At last, troops campaigning in the field were no longer out of touch with their base of operations. Reports and orders flashed back and forth to the amazement of civilians that happened to see the flashes.

The post's most active signal officer was First Lieutenant Theodore Mosher, who had entered the signal corps back in the 1870s and enthusiastically became involved with this new communication "wonder."

First stationed at Fort Lewis in 1885, Mosher discovered that the "signal property is in unserviceable condition." He promptly had two working heliographs shipped to the post. With its reliance on mirrors for signaling, the heliograph worked particularly well in the sunny, dry Southwest with its abundant high points from which to flash signals.

Under ordinary conditions, the field heliograph could transmit messages (called heliograms) thirty to forty miles at a maximum rate of ten words per minute. Under ideal

conditions the message could be transmitted up to ninety miles without relay stations.

The sender used a mirror with a small non-reflective spot in the center. He aligned the heliograph to the target by looking at the reflection of the target in the mirror, then moved his head until the target was hidden by the non-reflective spot. Keeping his head still, he adjusted the aiming rod so its cross wires bisected the target. He then aligned the mirror with tangent and elevation screws, thus aiming the sunbeam at the target.

Opening and closing a shutter mounted on a second tripod produced the flashes. If the sun was in front of the sender, its rays were reflected directly from this mirror to the receiving station. If the sun was behind the sender, the sighting rod was replaced by a second mirror, to capture the sunlight from the main mirror and reflect it to the receiving station.

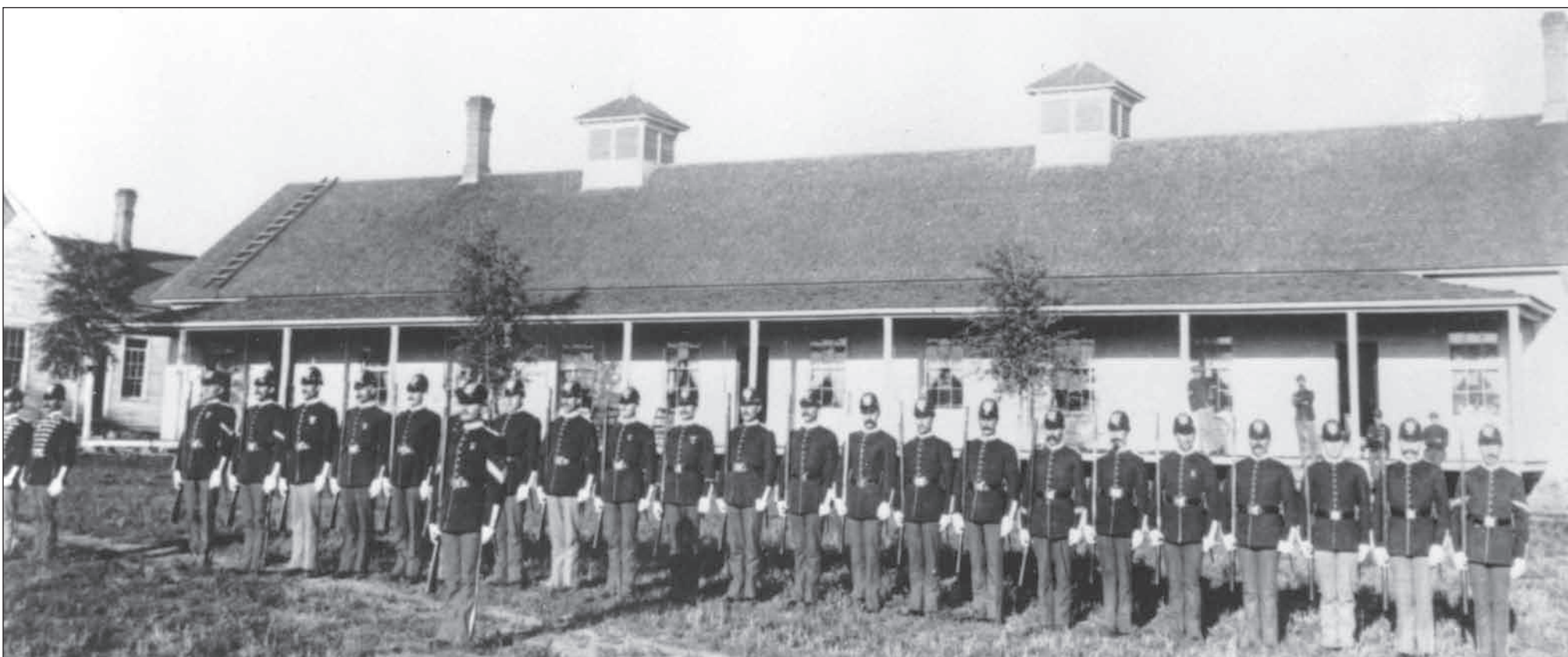
Mosher trained the men. Four people were needed, one to operate the device, another to receive messages, another to record messages, and yet another to keep the mirror adjusted as the sun moved. From the ridge behind the

post he sent signals to Point Lookout (about 23 miles away) and then on to the Blue Mountains in Utah, another 50 miles distant.

Mosher sent heliograph signals whenever troops were in the field to the west. Troops campaigning in Utah and western Colorado benefited from this new device and were much more quickly able to respond to an area where there might be trouble between the settlers and renegades raiding in the region.

For a fleeting moment, the heliograph had been a factor in the settlement of the Four Corners region. Locals were amazed as they watched signals flash back and forth. As long as the fort remained active, so did the heliograph, which finally went dark when Fort Lewis was abandoned in 1891.

.....
Duane Smith is a professor of history at Fort Lewis College and an emeritus member of the Board of Directors for the La Plata County Historical Society.



Company A, 22nd Regiment Infantry in front of their quarters at Fort Lewis, about 1885. There are no known photographs of the heliograph device at the post, but this photo does date to the time of its use.

Courtesy of Center of Southwest Studies, Fort Lewis College

History Comes Alive in La Plata County

With funding from the Colorado State Historical Fund, the San Juan Mountains Association and the La Plata County Historical Society are pleased to announce "Heritage Education," a three-program project to increase community awareness of local historical resources and the importance of historic preservation by involving participants in engaging activities. The project will expand knowledge about historic preservation through first-hand experiences of multi-generational participants.

In History-Hands On! participants will learn about historic cemetery documentation and preservation techniques through visits to the Animas City and Hermosa cemeteries. The Animas City Cemetery program will be offered June 22-24, 9am-1pm, with a required orientation June 20 at 7pm in the Animas Museum. The Hermosa Cemetery program will be offered August 14-16, 9am-1pm, with a required orientation August 13, at 7pm in the Animas Museum. Registration deadlines are June 6 and July 30, respectively.

History In Your Own Backyard consists of two educational tours to the historic towns of Allison and Tiffany. Session one was held

in April and Session Two is May 19, 9am-2pm, (registration deadline May 4).

History Detectives: Youth Day Camp is being offered for ages 10-12 in two sessions. The Animas City Detective Agency will focus on the history of Animas City and its importance to the development of La Plata County and mining in the San Juan Mountains. The camp will be July 19, 9am-3pm, (registration deadline May 14).

If Headstones Could Talk will highlight the historic Animas City Cemetery. Participants will learn about the concepts of historical archaeology and cemetery documentation. The program is offered July 26, 9am-3pm, (registration deadline July 18).

The cost per session/per person for all of the programs is \$25. Participants must bring their own lunch. For more information or to register contact:

Ruth Lambert, Ph.D.
Cultural Programs Director
San Juan Mountains Association
ruth@sjma.org 970-385-1267

Heritage

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It's about honoring and preserving our past as we look to the future.



For Diane and Fred Wildfang and the La Plata Electric Association it's a tradition of quality, integrity and commitment to family and community.

We not only congratulate this year's recipients of the Heritage Award, we sincerely thank them for their contributions in preserving the heritage of La Plata County.



COMMITTED TO OUR COMMUNITY SINCE 1882

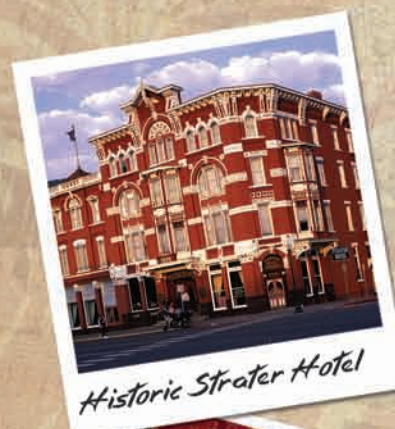
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Photo courtesy of La Plata County Historical Society

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THE COUNTY GROWS ~ COMMUNICATION EXPANDS

DURANGO'S FIRST NEWSPAPER: A Record of a Community

by Carolyn Brown

When Durango was founded in 1880, it became clear the railroad boomtown would need a newspaper. Newspaper men rushed to the area. Caroline Wescott Romney won the race.

A widow in her 40s, reported to be small in stature with blond hair, blue eyes and a nose for news, the newspaperwoman had been a teacher (of Greek and Latin), a librarian and a journalist in the East. She came to Colorado in 1879 and set up her presses in Leadville. But the call of Durango was too much to resist.

In December of 1880 she boarded the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad and headed south toward Cumbres Pass, then known as Alta. The rails stopped a few miles beyond Alta, so Romney took the train to the end of the line. A four-horse carriage took the woman and her baggage a short distance, before plunging into a snow bank. They recovered and headed down a mountain, so steep that she noted, "We held our breaths, shut our eyes and hung on."

After spending the night in Chama, she set off for Durango. On a trail with no bridges, Romney figured they crossed one stream 30 times – "that we counted to say nothing of the times when we were so scared that we couldn't count – and the San Juan which we struck next, sixteen times." Their thoroughbred horses tired out, so they borrowed a horse, which they then traded for mules. When her party reached the Ute Agency on the Pine River, they switched to government horses for the remainder of the journey. The harrowing trip was too much for the fine carriage, so it was replaced by a lumber wagon at some point. The trip from the end of the tracks had taken three days and three nights, in storms of snow and sleet.

"At last we struck the Animas, coming in from a side valley. Ah me! Had it been different it would have broken our hearts. 'The Valley of the Spirits' is two or three miles wide, the rapid river in the midst, so rapid that the ice king has failed to bind it with his fetters...Two miles down the valley lies the new city to which we ride, between the bluffs, in a continual dream of ideal beauty in the wilderness, the Mecca of our ended pilgrimage."

Mrs. Romney wasted no time. The building she had anticipated had not been built, so from a tent she published the first newspaper in Durango, *The Durango Record*, on December 29, 1880. In that first issue, she explained,

"Nature abhors a vacuum, *The Record* therefore took form to fill the void in the newspaper field existing in Durango. The city needed a paper; therefore *The Record*."

The *Record* published a daily edition with news from the state, and a weekly edition with local news. She praised her new community, "a land not only flowing with 'milk and honey,' but seamed with silver and gold and floored with coal."

The first editions were printed on small size paper, since circumstances only allowed the use of her small, job press. By January she had a "commodious office, 22 X 50 feet" and issues reached their full size of 24 x 36 inches, with seven columns of print to the page. The *Record* was a success from the start, owing in no small part to Romney's efforts and energy. She would gather news on the street and dash to the office to write. She had a staff of four helpers to do

the typesetting and printing, and it was noted with some pride they were paid their weekly wages without fail on Saturday nights. With a good head for business, she demanded "all subscriptions must be accompanied with cash" and railed against patent medicine sellers who wanted too much ad space for too little money.

The *Record's* monopoly in Durango was short-lived. The *Southwest*, the *Animas City* newspaper, moved 2 miles south to Durango in January of 1881. Romney noted that it was "a faithful resume of the *Daily Record* so far as local affairs are concerned." In April of 1881 the *Durango Democrat* rolled out its first edition and in June the *Republican* joined the fray. With Durango's population of 2,500, competition among the newspapers was spirited. When the *Democrat* failed, Romney noted in her May 9 edition, "Owing to lack of brains and lack of money the *DD* came to grief this morning."

Romney had a lively writing style, and faithfully reported the significant events of the community. She was particularly fond of noting "firsts" in the area. These stories provide a record of the growth of Durango. The first hold-up on January 29 was hailed as "a sure sign of a booming town." She reported the birth of the first baby, the first church services and the first (and only) lynching. The *Record* was part of one "first" when its original tent became the origin of the first fire in the city. She also reported on social events, providing a glimpse of daily life in early Durango.

Romney noted, "We made money hand over fist the first year. Then we spent it all beating our opponent." The *Herald* purchased her presses and in May 1882 combined the daily and weekly *Record* under the *Herald* banner. Romney headed to California, but by 1884 she had returned to Colorado, managing the *Trinidad Review*.

In 1901 the *Denver Republican* reviewed her work and said, "Caroline kept her readers interested and the town alert. Little escaped her eye and pen."

Romney's efforts to inform her community serve as a priceless record of the early days of Durango.



Caroline Romney, photographed later in life after her time in Durango. Photo courtesy of Duane Smith.

.....
Carolyn Bowra is descended from area newspapermen and is director of the Animas Museum.

Black, White and Read All Over the County

In a time before radio, television and the Internet, newspapers were the life blood of the communities they served. "With vitality and nervous energy," Duane Smith once wrote, "they reported, defended, promoted, chastised, civilized, [and] politicized [their communities]."

Durango and La Plata County have a rich newspaper history. As Southwest Colorado's largest community, Durango can boast the lion's share of newspaper titles published in La Plata County – more than 30 in its 132-year history. Most had a political bent, like the Durango Democrat and the Republican; more extreme was The Durango Klansman. Only one newspaper has endured more than a couple of decades – The Durango Herald, founded in 1881.

Historically, events in Bayfield were chronicled by the Bayfield Blade; the Pine River Times now follows in its footsteps. In Ignacio, the Southern Ute Drum followed the town's original newspaper, the Ignacio Chieftain.

The only other La Plata County newspapers known to exist outside of Durango were the La Plata Miner in La Plata City and Animas City's The Southwest, which moved to Durango in January 1881.

Newspapers are one of our most important resources for history research, and the Animas Museum has an interesting collection of early La Plata County newspapers, including several rare issues.

by Robert McDaniel



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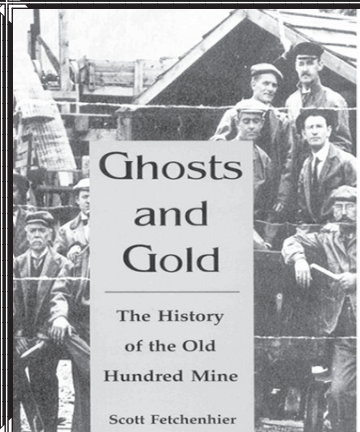
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THE COUNTY GROWS ~ COMMUNICATION EXPANDS

THE TELEGRAPH: Communication on a Line

by Jeff Johnson

A tour of La Plata County's historic structures and notable landmarks has for years yielded wonderful opportunities to observe those aged buildings and settlement remnants that harken to our communities' roots. Yet, while kicking dust around the county you may occasionally find a much overlooked vestige of our frontier days in the form of weather beaten and splintered old poles. A somewhat rare find these days, these graying masts carried strands of important wire for a one time ground breaking technology known as the telegraph. Usually found only along the old railroad rights-of-way in our region, the oft forgotten telegraph pole and the occasional sun bleached glass insulator have quite a story, one that foretells how we have come to communicate to this very day.

“What hath God wrought”

These four words, taken from Old Testament scripture, became the first electromagnetic telegraph communication in the U.S. on May 24, 1844. Delivered by none other than telegraph pioneer Samuel Morse, the electric pulses that he transmitted to a B&O railroad depot signaled the dawning of a new era, one where information that concerned a fledgling nation could move across great distances in a short amount of time via the “telegram.” During the 1850s, the new Western Union telegraph company consolidated various telegraph systems across the country and began the task of stretching wire from coast to coast. By 1861, transcontinental telegraph capability was a reality, and the stock ticker and money transfer services were in place within the following decade.

While it may seem hard to compare Morse code, antiquated poles, glass insulators, and wires with the latest application on today's wireless devices, it is easy to appreciate the profound impact this now defunct technology had upon the masses of another century. Be it a simple telegram conveying greetings from a loved one, or a terse delivery of significant news events that were shaping our history, the telegraph propelled us forward into an early “information age” long before the term would be coined in our modern era.

The telegraph and America's growing railroad system would quickly become interdependent in the years that followed its development. Railroad companies

maintained their own proprietary lines for company business, yet their poles would often accommodate a separate line for the Western Union Company as the former entity reached into locales yet untouched by the latter. In many railroad stations, the busy and highly trained railroad telegrapher would perform double-duty, handling Western

not on the radar when General William J. Palmer was planning his narrow gauge Denver and Rio Grande Railway in 1870. While the founders of Animas City were toiling to create a new town site by the mid-1870s, their future “high speed” communication link to the outside world was slowly making its way from Denver via Pueblo and the Royal Gorge

a hopeful and hearty assembly of Colorado pioneers. On July 30, 1881, telegraph wires reached the new town of Durango while not a moment was spared in sending a press release across the nation; now everyone would know that steam engine whistles were within earshot. The first passenger train rolled into the corporate limits on the following morning and the new wires were abuzz while arrangements were being made for a grand celebration on August 5.



J.B. Bennett, the first telegraph operator in Ignacio, sits at his station in this undated photograph. Photo courtesy of Animas Museum Photo Archives, Pargin Collection

Union business while giving priority to the time sensitive train movement dispatches and related information. The efficient dispatching of railway train movements via telegraphic means was paramount to safe and reliable operations, and its viability proved worthy of continued use well into the twentieth century.

La Plata County was four years from its inception and our picturesque region was

country on wooden poles planted along the grade of Palmer's narrow gauge “Baby Road.”

As economic significance of the San Juan region grew in the latter 1870s, young La Plata County would soon be earmarked for inclusion in a widening plan of the D&RG's conquests. Along with iron rails, the wire strands that had been closing the communication gap across the country for decades would soon reach

**Morse Code:
Communicating in a
dash – and a dot.**

Almost 200 years before the first Tweet ever appeared on the internet, the creation of the telegraph by American painter-turned-inventor Samuel F.B. Morse made rapid communication across the country, and eventually across continents, possible. While studying art in Europe, Morse lamented in a letter to his parents that it would take four weeks for him to return to America by boat, and almost six weeks for a letter to reach them. When Morse returned home in 1832, he shared the story of his long trip with the American scientist Charles Jackson who helped Morse understand the science of electricity. After previously unsuccessful experiments, an 1843 federal grant enabled Morse to build the first telegraph line from Washington D.C. to Baltimore.

Telegraph operators communicated through Morse code, a series of clicks made when an electrical pulse was sent through the telegraph line that released a sounding pin held to a magnet. The first Morse code assigned numbers of clicks to specific letters, but was abandoned and replaced with specific dot and dash sequences for individual letters. The most commonly used letter, e, was spelled in Morse code with a single dot. In 1850, when undersea cable made international telegraph communication possible, the original Morse code was revised so that messages became shorter, and took less time to transmit. The original code became known as American or railroad code, and today is found only in museums and historical reenactments. The International, or Continental Morse code developed for overseas communication is recognized as the official Morse code today.

By Evan West

THE COUNTY GROWS ~ COMMUNICATION EXPANDS

As with other railroads, the narrow gauge lines utilized the Morse code system to relay data from terminal to terminal. In La Plata County, the now historical Durango depot was once the repository and point of origin for those dots and dashes that carried vital information for railroad operations. The telegraph operator's primary function was to copy directives from the railroad dispatcher for train movement and relay this information to trainmen via a "Train Order." These orders (written on thin onionskin paper known as "flimsies") were transcribed in a very clear and specified format to convey the critical details that governed safe train movement. Typical of many stations on the narrow gauge in early years, the Durango telegraph operator would also be required to handle local Western Union (WU) business through contractual agreement, although Western Union eventually opened their own local facility in the years that followed. WU held the responsibility of maintaining the physical lines along the railroad right-of-way until that task was transferred to the D&RGW in the late 1950s. During that period, the WU lineman out of Alamosa had motor car privileges to occupy the 3-foot mainline to Durango while en route to wayside destinations in need of repair or maintenance.

So how did this telegraph work? In its basic form, the telegrapher would receive electrical pulses sent over the wire via a device called a "sounder." The sounder would convert the pulses into audible clicks from which the telegrapher would interpret the code into

the intended message. This incessant clicking sound may be familiar to those who have watched old western movies that recreate the din of early day railroad terminals, complete with the visor-donning telegrapher studiously copying communications as they rolled in on the wire. Another equally important device at the telegrapher's desk was the "key." This simple switch device would open and close the electrical circuit by manually pressing upon a handle that would touch a contact, thus closing the circuit. This tool was the mechanism employed in the transmission process, sending Morse code to another destination. Multiple sounders and keys were often used in telegraph offices that utilized more than one wire system, although the Durango station utilized a jack to access the different wires in later years.

An early Rio Grande want ad for telegraphers required that the applicant must be able to copy Morse code at 25 words per minute. This may seem a modest feat, yet imagine this task while tuning out the noisy disruptions of a busy station in the heyday of rail transportation. These proud and skilled technicians of early communication were a competent lot, and their attention to form and detail was pivotal to serving their company while providing our local community with accurate information and responses.

In the early 1900s, the Rio Grande railroad began to utilize the "telegraphone." Known in slang as the "message phone," this device allowed telephone voice transmissions to be sent over the existing wire while maintaining the use of telegraph. The 1881 era lines

winding into La Plata County would now carry voices where only Morse pulses once traveled. However, the marginal quality of voice communication over the telegraph lines mandated their primary use to be that of general communications and emergency; the veritable telegraph would prevail for dispatching the movement of trains. By the late 1930s, use of the telegraphone was encouraged by the railroad between Alamosa and Durango in order to allow a direct conduit of information between train crews and dispatchers when trains encountered unusual delays, threatening weather, or any other emergency. To this end, telephone "depots" were provided at terminals, or a crew could simply tap into the telegraph wire at any location between terminals using a portable telegraphone device. Phone booths were also erected at locations between stations where their use was deemed practical.

All Good Things.....

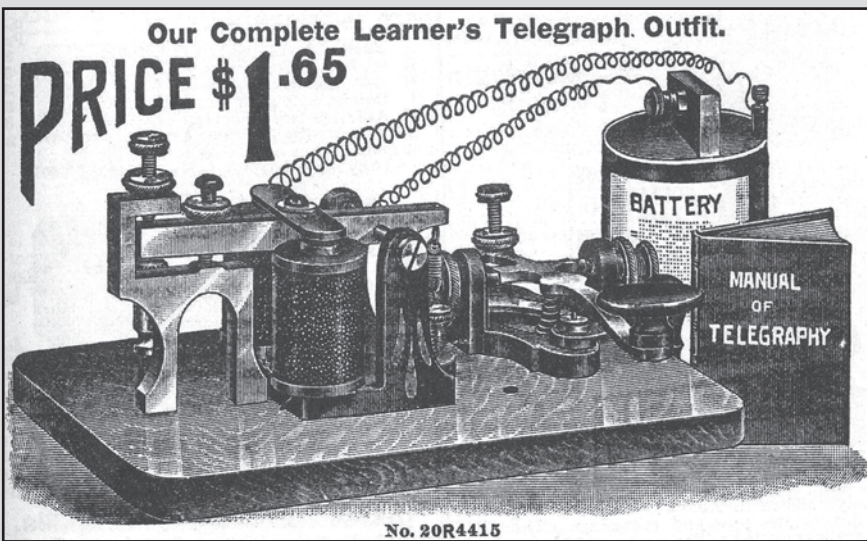
Interestingly, the use of telegraph along the narrow gauge survived well into the 1960s. In 1961, local resident and now railroad historian Amos Cordova found his way into the position of Agent (and telegrapher) at the Durango terminal. After years of bucking the "extra board" and seeing the interior of virtually every depot on the old Alamosa Division, he handled the railroad business affairs in our community while the narrow gauge territory of his company was in the throes of a beleaguered swan song. Having passed the railroad's pre-requisite 25 wpm test in Alamosa in 1950, he would eventually

become the last man to operate the railroad's telegraph key in La Plata County.

Amos relates that in later years the message phone was the preferred choice for communications with the train dispatcher, yet the telegraph key would continue to carry his eastbound train consist (the cars in a train and their various loadings) information to Alamosa. The trainmaster in Alamosa would then prepare instructions for the routing of each car and also determine the power requirements to move the manifests over the 4 percent grade from Chama to Cumbres Pass. December 6, 1968, marked the end of an eventful era as the last train from Alamosa made its way into the Durango yards. Upon tying up his crew from the 107-mile run from Chama, Conductor Jim Mayer received the railroad circular confirming the end of service on the old mainline from the east until further notice.

But further notice never arrived, and shortly thereafter the railroad telegraph line was cut between Alamosa and Durango. With that initial and deliberate snip of a mere wire, our railroad's role in a form of communication that Mr. Morse once proclaimed God hath wrought, now became but a footnote in history for this storied community.

.....
Jeff Johnson arrived in La Plata County in 1981 and began a 22 year career in railroading that started on the Durango and Silverton. Currently serving as the Project Manager for Blackstone Models, Jeff joined the LPCHS Board of Directors in the fall of 2011.



The 1902 Sears, Roebuck and Co. catalog offered a full page of telegraph instruments, designed for learning telegraphy. The catalog boasted, "To those who are about to start in life, either ladies or gentleman, there is nothing at the present time which offers better inducements than telegraphy. The smallest salaries paid are about \$35.00 per month, but the salaries usually paid are from \$50.00 to \$125.00 per month ... Those who are not familiar with telegraphy are liable to believe that it is something mysterious and difficult to learn, but this is a mistake. It is very easy to learn, [and] can be thoroughly mastered in from two to six months. And with a reasonable amount of care and application it can be learned at home..." Unfortunately we can no longer order from the 1902 Sears, Roebuck and

Co. catalog. So as a public service, the La Plata County Historical Society offers a telegraph aptitude test. Decipher the message above and see if you have the skills to be a telegrapher.

MORSE CODE		
A ·—	N —·	1 ·— — — —
B —···	O — — —	2 ·· — — —
C —· — ·	P —· — ·	3 ·· — —
D —· —	Q —· — —	4 ·· — —
E ·	R ·· —	5 ·· — ·
F ·· — ·	S ·· —	6 —· — ·
G —· — ·	T —	7 —· — ·
H ·· — ·	U —· —	8 —· — ·
I ··	V ·· — ·	9 —· — ·
J —· — —	W —· — —	0 — — — —
K —· — ·	X —· — ·	
L ·· — ·	Y —· — —	
M — —	Z — — ··	

Look for the answer on page 23

THE COUNTY GROWS ~ COMMUNICATION EXPANDS

A LITTLE TELEPHONE TALK

by Jill Seyfarth

Human beings are a talkative bunch. We've always wanted to know what is going on, even in the early days of La Plata County, when farmers lived far apart. The settlers quickly embraced the new-fangled telephone. By 1884, a telephone line was strung

and Kline operated a community-owned telephone line soon after Marvel was platted in 1916. In the 1950s a new line connected Durango to Fort Lewis College, which at that time was located south of Hesperus. The Marvel-Kline system was upgraded at about the same time to an eight-party line that served the Breen area.

A caller on the west side of La Plata County paid a long distance charge to call Bayfield and Ignacio until 1990. Former Marvel area resident Emma Horvath remembered that in the 1950s, people would go to the Breen Mercantile to use either the Durango phone or the Marvel exchange to avoid long distance toll charges.

It appears that the Florida Mesa area may have been among the last to get telephone

service. Usually the phone lines on the Mesa were community projects. For example, a group of about ten farmers extended a line in the area around County Road 230 in 1906. Hikers and bicyclists on the Telegraph Trail now follow part of the old telephone line. Other party lines connected the folks on Florida Mesa to their neighbors.

Party lines were common up into the 1980s. One Durango woman remembers getting in trouble when as a youngster she and her teenage friends would gossip on a party line and an adult would overhear them and reprimand them.

Callers learned to recognize the pattern of long and short rings that signified a call was for them. Nobody ever thought they would want or need caller ID.

Jill Seyfarth is an archaeologist and historian who lives in Animas City. Ruth Lambert contributed to this article.



Telephones were an important tool in offices throughout the country. In this 1945 photo, secretary Lillian Ruland and school superintendent Elza Needham take advantage of the latest in telephone technology.

Photo courtesy of Animas Museum Photo Archives

from the railroad depot in Durango to the military post of Fort Lewis, which was located south of present day Hesperus.

Durango had a telephone system of its own, supporting 66 phones by 1894. Even the remote mines in the La Plata Mountains were connected. In 1905 the Durango Democrat newspaper reported that the May Day mine was close to completing a new office, ore house and tramway, and that telephone service was to be installed that month.

Bayfield was equally up to date. The town was self-sustaining with its own water-powered flour mill giving its name to Mill Street. Bayfield had a telephone company by 1904. The farmers and ranchers located outside of Bayfield connected to each other's lines to create a phone network in the Pine River Valley.

Telephone service arrived on the east side of La Plata County in 1916, via the Rosa-Ignacio Telephone Company. H.C. Linebarger and R.P. Hott of Tiffany and A.H. Long of Rosa started the company by extending a line from Ignacio to Tiffany to Arboles. Telephones were connected to the line as residents' incomes permitted.

On the west side of the county, Marvel

Helpful Telephone Hints

It is difficult to imagine a world where everyone did not carry a cell phone, enabling talking or texting from anywhere at any time. But once upon a time, phones were firmly tethered to a wall by the telephone line, and the receiver was linked to that by a cord. One had to stay in one spot to talk on the phone. As telephones grew in popularity, the telephone company (there was only one) offered helpful hints for their use.

From the Summer 1940 telephone directory, in the Animas Museum research library.

"When you want to talk with a particular person simply tell the operator the town, telephone number, if available, and the name of the person desired. This is a person-to-person call.

APPOINTMENT CALLS

On person-to-person calls, the called person can be notified that you wish to talk to at a definite time, convenient to you. No extra charge is made for this service.

MESSENGER CALLS

If the called person does not have telephone service, the telephone company will send a messenger. The rate for the call is the same as the person-to-person rate, plus the cost of sending the messenger.

WHY NOT CALL THEM UP?

The telephone is the most personal and satisfactory way of sending greetings, congratulations, invitations and condolences. For making reservations when traveling, visiting with absent members of the family and keeping in touch with home and office while away. A telephone call is next best to being there in person."



Instructions for telephone use excerpted from the July, 1941 telephone directory in the Animas Museum research library.

OPERATION OF DIAL TELEPHONES



METHOD OF DIALING- Remove the receiver and listen for "DIAL TONE" – a steady humming sound. Do not start to dial until you hear this tone. Leave the receiver off the hook and:

1. Place your finger in the dial opening through which is seen the first figure of the number you wish to call, and turn the dial to the right until your finger strikes the fingerstop.
2. Remove your finger and without touching the dial allow it to return to its original position.
3. In the same way and in sequence, dial the remaining figures of the number you wish to call.

DO NOT MOVE THE DIAL OR RECEIVER HOOK DURING CONVERSATION

RINGING SIGNAL – Within a few seconds after dialing the number, you should hear the "RINGING SIGNAL" an intermittent "burring" sound, indicating the called telephone is being rung.

PARTY LINE AND EXTENSION USERS – Be sure to listen for dial tone before dialing to avoid interfering with other parties who might be using the line.

THE COUNTY GROWS ~ COMMUNICATION EXPANDS

THE TRANSATLANTIC TELEPHONE CABLE “CONNECTION” TO DURANGO

by Jennifer Stollman

Pulitzer Prize winning commentator Thomas Friedman observed that in a span of just over 150 years telecommunications had rendered the world flat and brought together worlds previously separated by distance. North America and Europe were brought together by the Transatlantic Telephone Cable (TAT), and Durango played a role in that effort. Far from the Atlantic Ocean, a 1972 international conference at the Strater Hotel helped improve telecommunications with Europe.

U.S. legislatures, business entrepreneurs, and 19th century reformers, understood that in order to foster stronger diplomatic ties, to create global markets, and to effect positive change, modes of communication needed to be created and cable needed to be laid across land and water. The first transatlantic telegraph cables, laid in 1858 and successfully tested in 1866, carried communication through Morse code. Individuals marveled at how quickly one could communicate across the Atlantic. The invention of the telephone greatly expanded communication as voices were carried across short and long distances. In 1927, the first radio-based trans-Atlantic telephone system was laid, establishing immediate verbal connections.

The twentieth century saw vast improvement in communication systems as each new decade seemed to bring a new technology. From 1955-56, the first standardized trans-Atlantic telephone cable (TAT 1) connected Europe and North America, allowing for less expensive and public telephone communication. Despite these incredible and fast improvements, communications between the continents still suffered from delays, missed and dropped communications, and troubles with service.

Cold War diplomatic issues, ever growing markets, and a stream of innovative ideas further encouraged the development of technologies, which improved modes of communications. Over the twentieth century, several conferences were held to discuss strategies to advance telecommunication.

Durango played a role in one of these conferences. From October 29 through November 4, 1972 the TAT 6 conference was held at the Strater Hotel. Initial conflicts involving political and public issues led to



Delegates to the TAT-6 conference gather in the lower level of the Strater Hotel, today's Pullman Room. Photo courtesy of Rod Barker

this choice. Conference conveners believed our town and its remote location served as an excellent meeting place far from the watchful eye of the press and interference by politicians. During conference sessions, participants agreed that this next cable would connect France and the United States—specifically beginning in Rhode Island. Earl Barker Jr. even planned extra-curricular events to keep spirits up and minds occupied by arranging a rodeo, a barbecue, and music. This telecommunication cable was an impressive achievement, including 10,000 channels and was able to quadruple the call capacity of the previous cables - combined. Since then, additional TAT agreements have served to further improve communication across the Atlantic.

The role the Strater Hotel and Durango played in the 1972 treaty negotiations, gave Durango a spot in the history of world-wide communication.

Jennifer Stollman teaches at Fort Lewis College in the History Department and the Gender and Women's Studies Department.

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THE COUNTY GROWS ~ COMMUNICATION EXPANDS

TELEVISION COMES TO DURANGO

by Robert McDaniel

Denver residents John J. and Sally Morrissey wanted to move to Durango, and John found a way to make it happen. Collaborating with his brother, Tom, and investors George Rock and Ben Stapleton, Jr., he would bring cable television to Durango.

Television was one of the great technological innovations of the 20th century. The first practical televisions dated back to the 1920s, but TV sets and programs did not come into wide usage until after World War II.

Early television programs were broadcast over the air by stations in larger cities using very high radio frequencies. People with antennas in nearby areas could usually get good reception. Rural areas remote from TV stations could rarely get a signal at all.

Cable television first became available in the United States in 1948 in Pennsylvania. In its first 24 years, cable television was used almost exclusively to relay over-the-air commercial TV channels to remote and inaccessible areas, as well as non-remote mountainous areas where reception was poor.

The Morrissey brothers, Rock and Stapleton had something in common – they were all active in the Colorado Democratic Party. Stapleton was the son of the legendary Denver mayor, and Rock had banking interests in Denver. Tom Morrissey, an electrical engineer, understood the technology and was the “brains” behind setting up the cable TV system in Durango.

The Morrissey brothers came to Durango in 1954 to find a good antenna location and begin setting things up. Initially, they would have to get signals from Albuquerque – Denver was out of the question. The Albuquerque transmitters were high up on Sandia Peak, and they found that an antenna location on the south end of Missionary Ridge could receive signals “relayed” from an antenna on Huerfano Mountain about half way between Albuquerque and Durango.

They constructed a three-sided shelter near their new Missionary Ridge antenna to house an amplifier and other equipment. The signal was carried by large coaxial cable down to Florida Road and into Durango where it was distributed to subscribers. Amplifiers were spaced along the route to maintain signal strength.

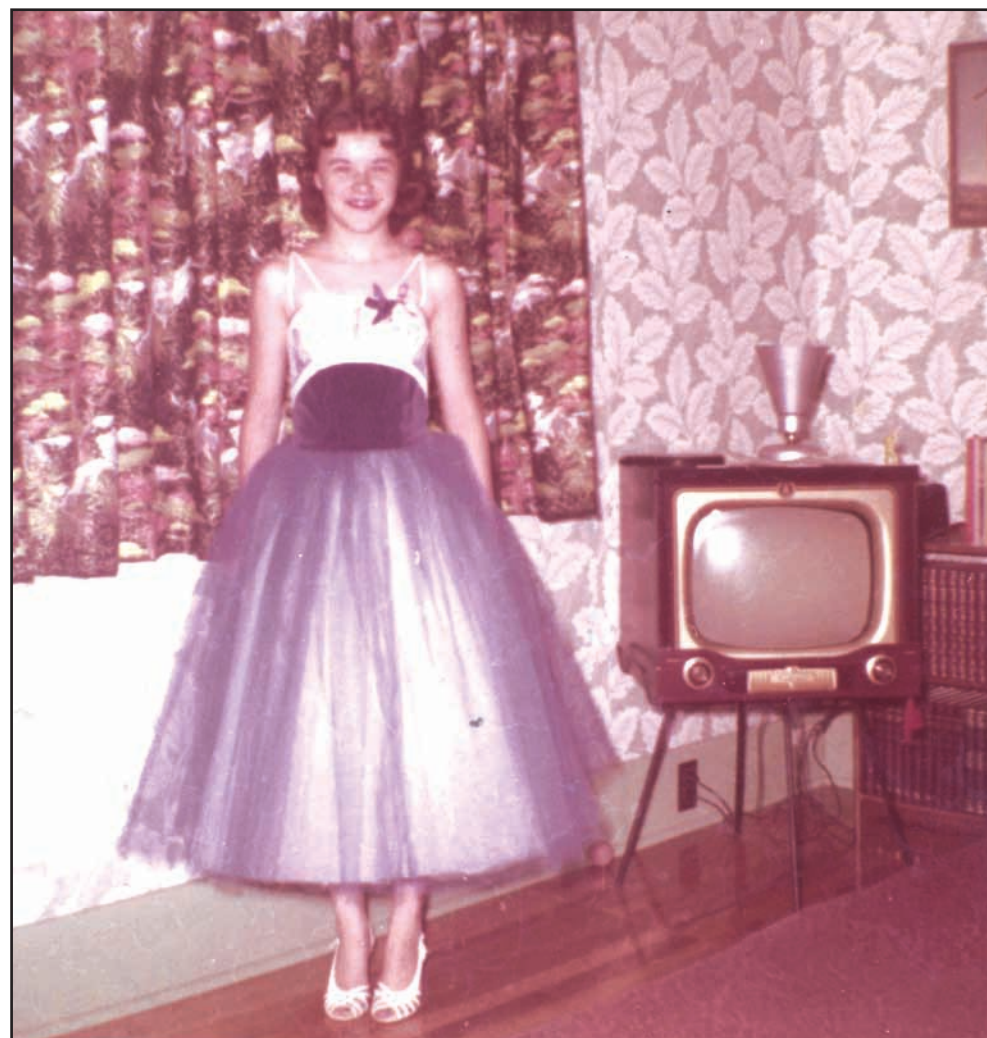
Meanwhile, Durango native V.J. Headrick was discharged from the navy in January 1955 and was looking for a job. A navy-trained electronics technician, he was hired to service and maintain the new cable TV company’s electrical equipment. He would stay with the company off and on for the next 19 years.

Headrick’s friend, Max Gomez, became the chief installer. At first, cable installations were expensive – around \$200 per residence. The company’s investors needed to recoup their up-front investment, so only the well-to-do could afford a TV hookup initially. Before long the cable network extended to most parts of town and even up the east side of the Animas Valley.

Early operations were pretty informal. Much of the electrical equipment in town was located in Morrissey’s back yard at the family home on Riverview, so V.J. Headrick got to know the four Morrissey children well. Mary [Morrissey] Thompson remembers that people used to call their house when the power went out, wondering why their TV wouldn’t work!

Charles DiFerdinando remembers that John Morrissey convinced his father and uncle, Sam and Fred DiFerdinando, to keep a television in the office/waiting room of their taxi company. The taxi dispatcher, who was on duty during television programming hours, could call Morrissey if there were reception problems. As a side benefit, customers could watch TV while waiting for a taxi, and it was good advertising for Morrissey’s company.

Durango Television Network originally



The McKenzie family on 3rd Avenue had one of the first televisions in Durango. It is pictured to the right of Julie McKenzie in this photo from the early to mid 1950's. Julie recalls there was quite a crowd around the t.v. when Elvis appeared on the Ed Sullivan Show. Photo courtesy of Kathy McKenzie

offered only one channel – Albuquerque’s KOB channel 4 [NBC]. Soon, they installed new strip amplifiers for Albuquerque channel 2 [KOAT – ABC] and channel 6 [KGGM – CBS]. By 1960, KNME, the Albuquerque PBS station was added to the lineup. Only channels 2 through 6, all “low band” VHF channels, could be transmitted until later in the 1960s when new amplifiers made channels 7 – 13 possible.

Baby boomers who grew up in Durango remember KOB’s “Dick Bills Show” in the afternoons, which featured Roy Rogers and Gene Autry westerns, as well as “The Little Rascals” movies.

The 1960s and 1970s brought many changes to local television – transistors replaced tube amplifiers, additional channels were added, color television became widely available and

nation-wide changes in policies regarding cable TV were instituted. The local Junior Chamber of Commerce installed a translator on Missionary Ridge in the 1960s that made television reception via antennas possible in rural areas outside of Durango.

On March 12, 1973, John Morrissey died during heart surgery in Denver at the age of 59. Morrissey was active in many community organizations, and as a Democratic Party stalwart, helped bring John F. Kennedy to Durango during the 1960 presidential campaign. Fittingly, he was honored by both the National and Rocky Mountain Cable Television Associations as a cable television pioneer.

Robert McDaniel is a fourth-generation native of Durango whose ancestors included miners, farmers, and a water attorney.

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THE COUNTY GROWS ~ COMMUNICATION EXPANDS

KDUR SETS THE TONE ON CAMPUS

by Evan West

In the history of radio 1961 was a pivotal year. Against all odds radio had overcome the emergence of television, and the loss of actors, managers, and technicians to Hollywood. Twelve million radios continued to be sold each year, and thanks to the invention of the transistor, over 9 million cars cruised the roads equipped with radio technology.

Five years earlier, Fort Lewis College had relocated to Durango from its Hesperus campus. In town, students could listen to the hits of Elvis Presley and Frank Sinatra on radios the size of their hands, but only one local radio station, KIUP, broadcast weekly updates on events at the college. In 1958 the students capitalized on the growing fad, forming what came to be known as the FLC radio club. For three years the students hosted a twice-monthly program on KIUP. In 1961, the club secured a \$220 grant from the Fort Lewis Student senate to establish an on-campus station.

The new station was built in a back room of the recently constructed Student Union Lounge, and operated with the call sign KFLC when it went on the air in May of 1961. By the end of its first month KFLC had logged over 400 broadcasting hours, with programming from 6 AM to 1 AM daily.

In 1962 the popularity of the station temporarily faltered. The student news magazine the Independent announced that the radio station would be temporarily abandoned due to falling student participation. Following the path of perseverance by radio stations everywhere, the few remaining club members returned to KIUP. Fort Lewis programming once again appeared

only once weekly, on a Wednesday evening program.

It would take 10 years for students and administrators to reconsider radio at Fort Lewis College. In 1972, then President Rexer Berndt approved the creation of a new radio station, and once again the student government provided the necessary funding, \$6,500.

Although the FCC granted the new station its first license in 1975, it would take more time for the station to return to its earlier, short-lived glory. In its first months the station broadcast only through a public address system in the Student Union building.

Tim Weisberg's "Because of Rain" became the first song played over the new stations airwaves in May 1975, as chosen by its first station manager Jim Vlasich. In December

of the same year KDUR officially absorbed all KFLC operations. The newly born station broadcast only two miles in its first year, barely enough distance to reach all of the Fort Lewis campus. On its second anniversary an antenna was installed on the roof of the Student Union, extending KDUR's range to downtown Durango and parts of La Plata County.

KDUR's range would remain limited to the immediate Durango area until its 35th anniversary in 2010, when the FCC approved the instillation of a 6,000-watt antenna on Rim Drive that today catapults the KDUR signal as far away as Aztec, New Mexico, and Pagosa Springs, Colorado. The station no longer signs off at midnight, and listeners can tune in to 91.9, or 93.9 FM, and kdur.org 24 hours a day.

Since the station adopted a free format

radio style in 1976, KDUR's DJs have created their own programming, and today students earn English practicum credit for writing and engineering their broadcasts. Fort Lewis College alumni remember KDUR as providing public radio options outside of country music in the 1970s, but since that time the benefits of KDUR to citizens of the Durango and four corners area have grown significantly. Community service programs include carpool information shared daily, and in addition to traditional weather reports, updates on the conditions of hiking and bicycle trails countywide. Volunteer DJs at KDUR are recruited from not only Fort Lewis College, but also Durango and the surrounding areas. Ranging in age from 16 to 60, their programming creates essential connections between the often-isolated college and its host communities.

In 2011 KDUR relocated to the state-of-the-art Ballantine Media Center in the recently renovated Student Union. The radio station's new home boasts sound studios, advanced computer broadcasting systems, and ample room to accommodate future growth and expansion, such as the proposed creation of a digital media major.

With as many as twelve programs daily ranging from Teen Talk, and This Ain't No Disco, to Pacifica Radio's Democracy Now, campus radio at Fort Lewis College continues to be as innovative today as its concept first was over thirty five years ago.



From the 1949 edition of the Collegian, the Fort Lewis Dramatics Club Broadcasts the play "The Way of the Shawn" on the KIUP airwaves Photo courtesy Animas Museum Photo Archives

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Evan West is a sophomore U.S. History major at Fort Lewis College, focusing on public history. This is his first article for History La Plata.

COMMUNICATION IS PERSONAL

PRESERVING FAMILY LETTERS, AN ALMOST EXTINCT MEDIUM

by Jan Postler

In this day of instant communication through electronic media and digital technology, the handwritten or printed letter on paper is becoming increasingly rare. Email and cell phone technology makes writing and mailing letters largely unnecessary. Someday there may be little in the way of letters left from this era to preserve people's thoughts and experiences.

Does your family have letters and postcards that have been handed down for generations? The Animas Museum holds several hundred letters and even more postcards in its Permanent Collections. The stories they tell range from the mundane to the sublime, revealing the ebb and flow of everyday life and special occasions.

Letters are personal expressions that go deeper than the facts. They express the emotions and values of the writer, reactions to and thoughts about life's experiences. Handwriting, or writing style in typed form, can reveal aspects of one's personality.

What was it like for a miner stranded in Silverton over a long winter and his young wife, living in Durango, who became ill? What does a soldier in a distant land reveal to his mother about the dangers he faces? How does a shy young man find the courage to ask his future wife to the dance on Saturday night? Letters written by these people give us a glimpse into their hearts and minds.

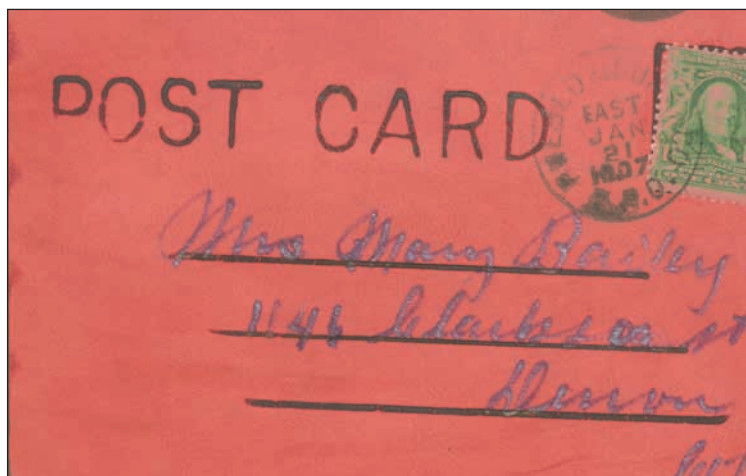
David Buchanan's letters from Vietnam to his family, preserved in the museum collections, chronicle a serviceman's reaction to war and hometown news. The Vietnam Conflict was the last war fought by the U.S. without such digital communication technology as email, Skype and social networking. What kinds of personal accounts of significant events will we have to show future generations? It is well to consider letter writing as an art worth saving.

How do we best preserve letters on paper that have survived from the past? The original letter can be protected by careful handling and storage. In addition, scanning provides a digital backup and means of duplication for family members without exposing the original to damaging light and handling.

The most damage to personal collections comes from improper handling. Letters that have been often read and shared are contaminated by acidic, oily fingerprints and torn from being unfolded and refolded many times.

If it is necessary to mark a brief identification note on the letter, use a number two pencil with rounded tip, never ink. Avoid sticky notes, tape, paper clips and staples.

Another cause of deterioration is improper



This leather postcard brought greetings from Durango on January, 21, 1907. It was sent to Denver, with a one cent stamp. Treasured mementos such as this can provide future generations a glimpse into an era. It is Critical that they are properly stored. Courtesy of La Plata County Historical Society

storage. Ink fades and paper darkens from exposure to light. The acid in wooden picture frames, trunks, drawers and boxes deteriorates paper. Harmful insects and mold thrive in damp basements and closets with poor air circulation. Paper becomes brittle in hot, dry attics where insects, birds, bats and rodents add to the damage.

Letters can be preserved by being stored away from light, open and flat, in special folders and boxes that are acid-free and lignin-free. Boxes should be placed on shelves at least four inches off of the floor and two feet below the ceiling.

A collection of letters may be slipped into individual transparent polyethylene or polypropylene sleeves and grouped in binders or mounted in albums of archival quality. Protect them from dust in binders with slipcovers, or albums in boxes. These preservation-quality items (made of acid-free materials and inert glues) are available from archival suppliers.

Individual letters that are viewed often may be protected from handling by encapsulating between clear sheets of archival polyester. Double-sided tape holds two polyester sheets together, with a margin around the letter and gaps at corners to allow the enclosure to breathe. Do not shrink-wrap.

Displayed letters can be framed by a trusted framer, using archival materials including ultraviolet-filtered glass, acid-free mat and an inert frame. Wood frames must not come into direct contact with the letter, and the paper backing should be acid-free and durable. A two-sided letter may be mounted with clear polyester corners onto an archival support for display, sandwiched between two sheets of ultraviolet-filtered glass or Plexiglas.

Your family letters can be both preserved and enjoyed using these techniques. For more information and names of archival suppliers, contact the Animas Museum.

Jan Postler has managed the artifact and archive collections at the Animas Museum for sixteen years. Trained in collections management at the Smithsonian Institution, she has served museums in Tennessee, Montana and Colorado for 38 years.

A Letter From Vietnam

This letter was handwritten by David M. Buchanan to his family in Durango. Buchanan was Staff Sergeant (S-5) at Pleiku Air Force Base in Vietnam. He served as chapel manager and bodyguard for the chaplains, who did not carry or use weapons. Buchanan is Curator of Decorative Objects and Furniture at the Indiana State Museum and Historic Sites.

266/0

21 Sept 71

Hi All,

We had something unusual today. Two rocket attacks in broad daylight. Neither of them were closer than 1/2 a mile to us. However one killed an army guy and wounded four other guys. What gets me is there was absolutely no use for it. The whole thing is idiotic!

...If you send some games send some that take a few players. Gwen sent me a couple of crossword puzzles and I have several different types of "solitaire" games. But the only other game I have is Monopoly and Checkers. So if you send some games I'd want ones that others can play too. Last night I was going to go to bed early but ended up with some guys talking about ghosts and UFOs. I didn't get to bed until 11:00. And I was tired this morning.

How about sending me some pictures of you two? And some of GM and GD [Grandmother and Granddad Harris]. And Effie [Evelyn Eldredge, honorary aunt]?

The number in the left-hand corner means "How many days to go / number of days since the last rocket attack."

Here's a P.S. We just had our 3rd rocket attack of the day. Looks like it will be a long day and longer night. If something happens remember I love you all.

D.

COMMUNICATION IS PERSONAL

THE RISE AND FALL OF THE POSTAL SERVICE IN WESTERN LA PLATA COUNTY

by Jean Campion

The first post office in western La Plata County was built in 1874 in Parrott City at the mouth of La Plata Canyon as part of the establishment of that townsite, the first in the county. There was no mail service yet, however, and none there in the winter for several years. But by 1881 that post office served about 500 residents, mostly miners.

A post office was also established at the Fort Lewis Military Post in October of 1880. After 1881, mail came on the train to Durango and then on to the fort weekly by oxen, horse, or mule teams through Wildcat Canyon. Delivery was erratic, though, due to poor roads and bad weather.

postmistress for the post office located south of the original school buildings. It was named the Breen Post Office. Later it was moved further south to the Aspaas home, and Annette Aspaas became postmistress in 1907. She served until 1921 when Knute Johnson took over. In the early 1930s, the Breen Mercantile was built and the post office moved there. This one closed in 1954.

A small settlement in Barnes Canyon in the Hay Gulch area called Content also had a post office for about ten years beginning in 1901. The mail was carried from Hesperus on horseback by the postmaster or -mistress. (There were three women and two men who held that position

board mounted on posts to serve as mail boxes for outlying residents. The mail was carried from Breen on horseback. Area residents still refer to that intersection as Tin Can Corner although all evidence of the cans is gone.

Later the Kline post office was moved to Hanford Miller's store southeast of the old Mormon Church. The town of Marvel didn't exist yet. After it was established, the Millers bought land and moved their store (and the post office) across from the Marvel school. It continued to be known as the Kline Post Office, however, because postal authorities were worried Marvel was too close in spelling to Marble, which was another town in Colorado. When Marble ceased to have a post office, Lawrence Miller, then postmaster, petitioned to have the name changed, and Marvel Post Office became official on April 1, 1953.

Redmesa was also established largely by Mormon settlers. They originally named the town Garland, but postal authorities didn't like that, either, because there was already a Fort Garland in the state. The first post office was in the home of Frank Greer, and his mother

Hanna was the postmistress 1906-1917. She suggested the name change to Redmesa which the government accepted. The post office moved to several different locations after that and discontinued in the mid-1950s.

Today only Hesperus and Marvel post offices remain. Marvel is currently threatened with closure due to the financial struggles of the United States Postal Service. The Hesperus post office is the distribution center for the residents of western La Plata County. Marvel serves those in the area who have post office boxes there and those who mail letters and packages, buy stamps, and use other services offered by a small country post office. It is a gathering place for local residents to visit with one another, buy a newspaper, and enjoy a slower-paced way of life that is quickly vanishing. Like Tin Can Corner, one day we may talk about the Marvel post office without any visible clues left of its existence.

.....
Jean Campion is a local author and historian. Her published works include historical novels about southwestern La Plata County: *Minta Forever* and *Return to Rockytop*.



Ray and Effie Miller (on left) at the original location of the Miller Store and Post office, southeast of the old Mormon Church ca. 1930. Photo courtesy of Russell Kennedy

When the Rio Grande Southern Railroad reached Hesperus in 1891, a post office was established in the home of Daniel Bailey about 3/4 mile north of Hesperus. In 1903 the post office moved to a store in Hesperus where it remained until 1962 when a new building was built at the present location. One of the early mail carriers, Don Demarest, tells of driving as far as possible up La Plata Canyon, usually to Mayday, in the winter and then putting on his snowshoes to continue his route. He would snowshoe up to ten miles one way, sometimes with a mountain lion following him, to deliver the mail to isolated miners.

Meanwhile, the Old Fort had been turned into an Indian School and Superintendent Thomas Breen's wife, Bessie, was appointed

over the years.) One local story is that the postmistress was riding along with the mail one day when she came upon a lone man riding his horse. She stopped to chat with him, wondering what a stranger was doing so far off the beaten path. Turns out his name was Zane Grey, and anyone who has read his western novels might understand where he got some of his settings. Years later Louis L'Amour would buy property in the area and set many of his westerns here, too.

Another post office came into being when "the Ute strip" was opened for settlement in 1899 and a small Mormon colony named Kline began about seven miles southwest of Fort Lewis. The post office was opened in 1904 south of Tin Can Corner (County Roads 128 and 129), so named because tin lard buckets were nailed to a



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COMMUNICATION IS PERSONAL

A PIECE OF HISTORY: Communicating Through Quilts

by Brianna McCormick



Quilts, thought of first as protection from cold, are often works of art, communicating themes, feelings and beliefs designated by the maker. As quilting is traditionally a craft practiced by women, the communication tends to be subtle, though when your eyes become attuned, the subtleties are clear.

The Animas Museum's Victoria Day quilt speaks volumes about the time it was made and the feelings and ideas of the group who constructed it. This 1930s era quilt was created in part by longtime Durango resident Victoria Day, wife of newspaper magnate and Civil War hero David Day. Mrs. Day moved from Ouray to Durango in 1892 with her children, husband and Mr. Day's controversial newspaper, *The Solid Muldoon*. Though the first few years of their life in Durango where at times sad for Victoria Day, she came to love her new home and the friends she made while living in La Plata County.

Mrs. Day's quilt gives the viewer a snapshot of Durango society in the late 1930s. It is made from bright printed fabric, iconic of the age. The Great Depression brought a great change in American fabric preferences: people turned

away from the darker prints that were popular in the previous century. During the depression era, quilting was one hobby women could feel good about. It encouraged socialization and the production of family goods. Most of the women who quilted during this time learned their skill in the Victorian Age and incorporated fancy stitching into their work. The Day quilt takes advantage of these skills by including embroidered names and dates.

The Day quilt is a signature quilt, meaning that the top is decorated with names and sometimes dates. Signature quilts first became popular with the invention of indelible inks in the 1840s and remain popular today. These quilts are generally made as a keepsake item, not to be used every day. They are most often made to celebrate the friendship of the signers who may even leave thoughts for the recipient, such as "remember me." They are also often used as a fundraising tool; a group makes a quilt, sells signatures or seeks signatures of "celebrities" and auctions the completed quilt to support a group or cause.

It is not known why this quilt was made. However the quilt itself gives many clues to its origin and purpose. Many of the women whose

names grace the quilt's surface are mentioned in connection with a monthly "Ladies Society Club." This club was hosted by a different member each month and was involved with local charity fundraising. Newspapers of the age also tell us that a sewing circle was a part of their monthly meetings. Could this quilt have been one of the fundraisers organized by the group?

The Day quilt clearly communicates many things to those who are looking, including who made the quilt, when it was pieced, where the group assembled it and perhaps what its purpose was. We also see the character of these women through their association with this charitable club, the fabrics they used and the way in which each signed her name. Looking at the quilt, we can see it is the product of a community minded group of women who came from all walks of life and worked together to make a difference in the lives of the residents of La Plata County.

Brianna McCormick has degrees in art history and textiles from the Massachusetts College of Art and Design. She is the museum assistant at the Animas Museum.

Victoria Sophia Folck Day, moved to her Durango home above the Animas River with her husband, newspaperman David Day in 1892. Mr. Day communicated through his newspapers, *The Solid Muldoon* and then later the *Durango Democrat*. Mrs. Day created quilts, such as the signature quilt in the Animas Museum's permanent collection. Photo courtesy of Center of Southwest Studies, Fort Lewis College.

In 1923 M.J. (Mike) Brennan built Lighthouse Texaco on north Main Avenue near the present site of Parkway Texaco (17th & Main). With gravity flow gas pumps, garage and a "curb service restaurant" the Lighthouse provided complete service for 1923. Mike's son Ed took over the family business and then Ed's son Charlie took over. Today, Charlie's daughter Judy Schmidt, his sons Dennis, Kelly, Kevin, Charles and Kegan, and grandson Jason Schmidt continue to provide service to the Durango area. Five generations later, during a Texaco convention in the late 90's, Kevin found out Brennan Oil was "the nation's oldest wholesaler." As of 2003, due to the merger between Shell and Texaco, Brennan Oil became an Exxon distributor; still serving you proudly throughout the Durango area.

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Community Heritage Awards



The crowd at 2011 Community Heritage Awards, honoring those who have contributed to preserving local history. Courtesy Kathy Myrick Photography

“Come an’ git it!” will be the communication of the moment on Friday, May 25th. The Bar-D Chuckwagon will again be the site of the Community Heritage Awards, honoring Fred and Diane Wildfang and LPEA for their contributions to the heritage of La Plata County. Tickets are still available for this festive

event, the first chance of the season to enjoy the Bar-D’s cowboy cuisine. Gates will open at 5:30 to allow plenty of time to browse in the shops or ride the Bar-D train. We have heard the rumor that there may be desperados lurking in the pines, to relieve guests of some of their cash. Luckily for the La Plata County Historical Society, this crime does pay and the loot will benefit the LPCHS. Folks will want to be in the dining area at 6:00 when the first pie goes on the auction block. Cal Story, of Treasure

Auction will try to control the crowd of spirited bidders, vying for ownership of some of the finest pies ever baked in the county. Dinner will be served promptly at 7:30 followed by the presentation of awards with emcee Deb Uroda. Even though her husband considers



Pies ready for the auction block. Spirited bidding on tasty treats benefits the La Plata County Historical Society. La Plata County Historical Society

her a newcomer, Deb’s 36 years in the area working at the Durango Herald, Fort Lewis College and School District 9-R give her an insight that is sure to lead to an enjoyable evening. A special performance by the Bar-D Wranglers will cap off the festivities. Tickets are \$40 each or you may wish to gather a group

and purchase a table. Center tables seating 12 are \$480; outer tables seating 10 are \$400. Proceeds benefit the La Plata County Historical Society and the Animas Museum. Individual and table reservations may be made by calling 970-259-2402, on-line at www.animasmuseum.org, or at the Animas Museum, 3065 W. 2nd Ave. Reservation deadline is Tuesday, May 15. Special thanks to our sponsors: the Durango Herald, Durango and Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad, First National Bank of Durango, La Plata Electric Association, Maynes, Bradford, Shipps and Sheftel LLP, Southwest Colorado Federal Credit Union, the Strater Hotel and the Women’s Resource Center.

COMMUNITY HERITAGE AWARDS

TRANSFORMING ~ IT’S ALL ABOUT MAKING CHANGES

The Story of How La Plata Electric Transformed Our Community
by Bruce Spinning

On almost any city street or country lane anywhere in the United States, you can find a utility pole with some “can-like” things suspended from it. These are electrical transformers—specialized coils of wire and metal designed to increase or decrease electrical voltages based on the needs of the energy users. These transformers are a bit like history. How so, you may ask?

Well, transformers change things and history is all about change. If nothing changed, there would be no history. History is about documenting and tracing changes over time.

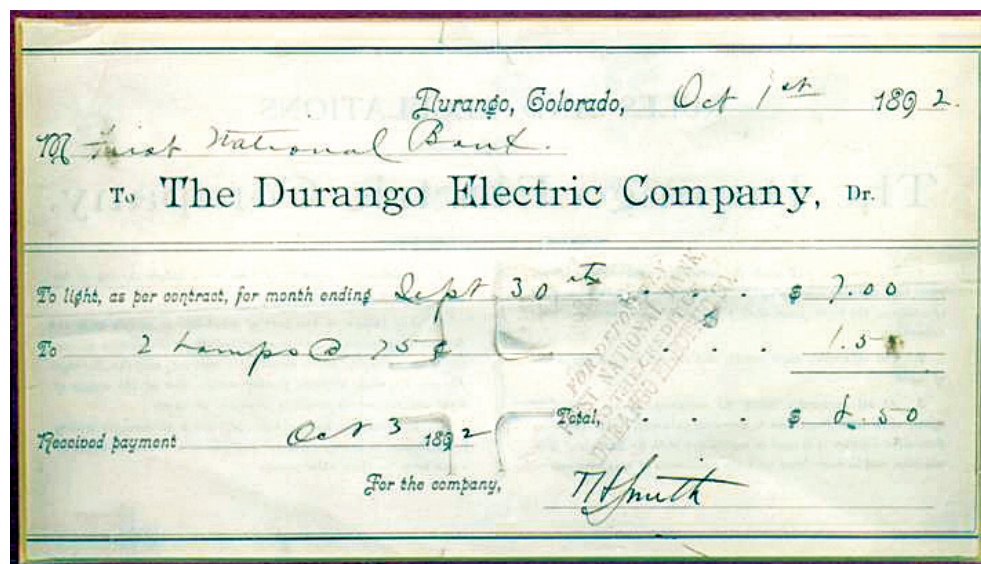
LPEA is this year’s choice for our Community Heritage Award because few changes in the world have had more impact here than the harnessing and arrival of electricity for everyday use by everyday people. For rural residents of La Plata County in 1939, this transformation was nothing short of stunning. The formation of the La Plata Electric Rural Electric Association Cooperative signaled the start of an area-wide transformation that is continuing today and will continue into the distant future.

Rural electric associations were part of a

national response to the economic crisis of the Great Depression, which had much in common with today’s economic challenges. The National Recovery Administration of the 1930s envisioned a system that would take electrical power made possible by a host of public works projects like the Tennessee Valley Authority and the Hoover Dam and deliver it to remote and rural regions. As part of the recovery efforts, a Rural Electrification Administration was created to help get power to people who had never had it.

City people had enjoyed the benefits of electricity well before the Great Depression began. But people in rural places, with their dispersed populations and long distances, never imagined that the wizardry of inventors like Edison and Tesla would ever reach them. The kerosene lantern or candle were still the norm for most farm folk in the 1920s. The best they had was a battery-powered radio set that, because of short battery life, they could only listen to for short periods.

LPEA paved the way for people to get more than just lights and appliances like refrigerators and toasters. It provided things like electric pumps to power irrigation



This 1922 Durango Light Company bill reflects a charge for the number of lights they had installed in the house. For a \$7.00 base charge and a \$0.75 per lamp fee for two lamps, this consumer paid an electric bill of \$8.50. Courtesy of La Plata Electric Association

COMMUNITY HERITAGE AWARDS

systems and gave people access to new equipment like electrically-powered hoists to lift heavy loads. Today's natural gas wells, which are an integral part of the area's economic wealth, are all made feasible by the electric pumps that help transport the gas.

Over a two-year period of canvassing, educating, planning, and organizing, the La Plata Electric Association, Inc. (LPEA) was incorporated on August 5, 1939. A loan was obtained to construct 188 miles of power lines to serve 350 people. Each member was required to purchase a share of stock in the cooperative for \$5.00, which was the total cost to each member to receive service. Under the REA rules, "Co-Ops" like LPEA made every rate-paying member an owner in the enterprise.

The question facing the start-up LPEA system was whether this kind of business model would be sustainable in the face of multiple challenges that often don't fit the model of a utility as a business. It took some significant courage to energize the company's lines on February 1, 1941, with 157 customers receiving electric power at that time. The first annual meeting of the members was held September 2, 1941.

A key part of the REA system structure

stipulated that these electrical cooperatives could distribute power to their members, but they were not allowed to generate it. REAs were required to purchase their power from commercial utilities, which owned power generating stations. In our area, this was the Western Colorado Power Company. The costs were high, but almost as soon as it got going, the demand was high as well.

Even in the early years of electrifying the area, the local utility systems were not producing enough power to meet demand. Since in some important ways the REAs were in competition with the commercial utilities, generating firms like Western made it standard practice to cut off the LPEA lines if the demand exceeded what they could supply. Without warning, LPEA subscribers would find themselves literally "in the dark."

Across the area, every REA was experiencing the same frustrations, and none of them liked it. As a group they felt stymied by a system of regulations they believed was wrong. So almost all of the regional REAs joined together and formed a "paper" company called Colorado-Ute Power. Leveraging their collective credit, they borrowed money and found a location near the town of Nucla, Colorado, where they built their own generating plant. *LPEA Continued on page 22*



A crew raises an electrical pole by hand in this undated photo from the archives of the La Plata Electric Association. Courtesy of LPEA

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LPEA Continued from page 21

Of course, both the government regulators and the area commercial generating firms cried “foul” and objected to the area REAs end-running the system. But the REA group was able to show the regulators that without a dedicated source of power, they would have to forever endure constant interruptions to their service. As is usual in these kinds of controversies, a compromise was reached. The Western Colorado Power Company took over operation of the Nucla Plant and the REAs got to keep their ownership of the plant and the power.

The Nucla Plant represented yet another big transformation in the story of electricity in our area and in the status of REAs in America. These area REAs had managed to gain credibility as real utility systems with vested value in both the marketplace and in the industry.

This also meant they needed to operate less like a “Mom-and-Pop” store and more like an important enterprise. Early on, electrical utilities didn’t have meters. Instead people got charged for the number of lights they had installed in the house. But that kind of billing program would not be economically sustainable, so in a few short years, meters were installed and people began paying for the amount of electricity they used.

In those early times, traveling throughout the entire county to read each person’s meter was not feasible. Even if the roads had existed to get the meter readers out there, reliable transportation was an issue. Visiting every meter in such a widely dispersed area was no simple task.

So LPEA came up with a solution. Each month, the utility sent members a self-meter-reading card. Using a “copy your dial” approach, members copied the locations of the “hands” on their meters and then mailed their self-readings back to LPEA. Based on those cards, LPEA issued monthly bills – which seldom got paid each month.

People in rural areas had both land and goods, but most lacked cash. As a result, until the farmers and ranchers sold their crops or animals in the fall, they had little or no money to pay the electric bill. LPEA “carried” most of them until about October of each year, at which time the rancher/

farmer would come into the office and “settle up,” paying last year’s electric bill out of this year’s crop money. For a good many years, this meant LPEA had some significant imbalances on its balance sheet.

But just as the federal power rules had limited REAs to distributing power, they also required the generation companies to have enough in-system resources to provide for the needs of their customers. That was a crisis for the old Western system. So in the early 1970s, the Western system was sold – but not wholesale.

The Colorado-Ute corporation that had been REA-created to build Nucla purchased the old Western power plants, and local REAs like LPEA bought out the distribution systems.

This was yet another giant transformation for LPEA. All at once, an REA utility that had been created to serve rural customers suddenly faced delivering power to multiple urban locales like Durango. This change brought the utility forward into being a fully diversified, electrical system. This included providing electricity for everything from a full scale ski resort at Purgatory to the area’s hospital and even to a growing state college.

The little cooperative formed in 1939 had been transformed in unexpected ways. Not even the national visionaries who conceived the REA system would have anticipated that it would become the kind of system represented by the evolving LPEA. Besides the expanded customer base and profile, LPEA absorbed a large segment of the old Western workforce, and the work-styles and cultural differences were new kinds of challenges in and of themselves.

What emerged from that time is an entity that has understood – possibly better than any organization in the area – that change and evolution are the real constants. It is nearly impossible to say what comes next in the electrical utility arena, but what began as a cooperative of a few farmers, has shown that an REA with LPEA’s history is likely to endure and even prosper for the benefit of the communities it serves – no matter how much things get transformed.

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Bruce Spinning’s family were Florida Mesa pioneers. He is a member of the La Plata County Historical Society board of directors.

COMMUNITY HERITAGE AWARDS

**DIANE AND FRED WILDFANG:
Visionaries of Second Avenue**

by Marilee Jantzer White

What began with the purchase and makeover of the Leland House by Diane Wildfang quickly gave birth to a vision, to renovate Second Avenue. Transplants from California, the Wildfangs brought with them to Durango Diane’s experience in real estate development and Fred’s expertise in marketing and advertising, and his passion for history.

Let’s step back for a moment to Second Avenue and 1992, and the changes initiated by the Wildfangs, the recipients of the La Plata County Historical Society’s Heritage Award for 2012.

While the Wildfangs’ search for a place to retire may have begun in Whitefish, Montana, it ended in Durango. On their arrival in 1992, the plight of Second Avenue and its urgent



Fred Wildfang (standing), Diane Wildfang, and her son Kirk Komick. Photo courtesy of the Wildfang family

need for renovation quickly replaced their earlier goal of retirement. At the time, Second Avenue was home to car dealerships such as Pat Murphy Motors, built in the 1920s by P. W. Pittman, where Steamworks now resides, and Pat Murphy's garage, now the location of the Durango Arts Center. Within five months they had secured a bank loan and purchased five properties on Second Avenue, including Leland House. The Wildfangs helped the tenants relocate and Diane and her son and daughter Kirk and Cara Komick began the six-month renovation of Leland House, the first step in a creative journey. P.W. Pittman built this historical landmark in 1927 and operated it as an apartment house for 22 years. And, in this case walls can speak.

Fred Wildfang has transformed its interior into a walk through history: each of its 10 rooms bears the name of a prominent figure who at one time lived on or had a close association with the property. Fred's research yielded the vintage photographs and texts which line the walls and offer us an invaluable glimpse into Durango's past.

As Diane notes, with work completed on the Leland House, it was difficult to ignore the "flop house" across the street. Constructed in 1892, the Rochester Hotel, originally known as the Peoples Hotel, held 30 rooms with just two bathrooms and had fallen on hard times. Diane and Kirk Komick purchased the Rochester, retaining, as Fred notes, "the original interior trim, hardware, doors, and windows." Diane endeavored to salvage everything possible. Now downsized to 15 rooms, each with a bathroom, even those extra doors were enlisted, and now serve as headboards in many bedrooms. Significant structural issues were addressed and the courtyard was cleared of its debris, testimony to years of occupation by transient roomers. But it was a quest for the spirit, the soul of the Rochester that attracted the poet in Fred.

A published author and poet, one of the founders of the Western Film Festival and one of the prime movers of the Durango Independent Film festival, Fred once again turned researcher. This time, he focused on movies. Hollywood production companies

looked to the San Juan Basin frequently during the 1950s as they renewed their infatuation with the Western genre film. Paramount, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, and 20th Century Fox all capitalized on the spectacular landscapes and stereotypical scenery required for the Western film.

Today to step into the Rochester Hotel is to step back in time to the "Hollywood of the Rockies." After scouring local archival records, Fred collected advertising posters from the many Hollywood films that are part of Durango's history. Following the completion of the Rochester's historically accurate renovations and three additional years of complying with regulations, Fred succeeded in having the Rochester placed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Meanwhile Diane and Kirk were once again hard at work, this time using private funds to restore the frame Victorian house built in 1890 by T.C. Graden. Then known as Lola's Place, it is now renamed the Cypress Cafe. The State Historical Society had rejected Diane's and Kirk's request for funds for its renovation.

Apparently the Society deemed it not worth the effort. Cypress Cafe and its next door neighbor, Eno's Wine Bar, another restoration project tackled by Diane, are the result of their efforts.

With this issue, History La Plata has travelled full circle, from idea to realization, and now returns to the idea itself. In 1995 at a LPCHS board meeting Fred proposed the publication of a supplement to focus on local history and then volunteered his services as editor for the publication. Although the title has been changed in recognition of the area served, it is to Fred and his vision that we owe the founding of this publication.

For their efforts on behalf of our community, their preservation of local history and for their transformative vision the LPCHS awards Diane and Fred Wildfang the annual Community Heritage Award.

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Marilee Jantzer White serves on the La Plata County Historical Society Board of Directors.

Groucho Marx Joins La Plata County Historical Society as Newest Member!



OK, so you got us. Groucho Marx has been dead for over 30 years, so he did not recently become our newest member. Too bad, because his sentiments on joining most any group are well known: "I don't care to belong to [any organization] that accepts people like me as members."

Groucho was misguided. The good folks at the La Plata County Historical Society would have welcomed people like him, (and Chico, Harpo and Zeppo too). The members of LPCHS are a diverse lot. Some are descended from area pioneers and some have just moved to the area. All are interested in learning more about the history and culture of the area, and preserving that past for future generations. An exhaustive search of the membership data base does, however, reveal a shocking lack of legendary comedians among the members.

But that does not mean we are lacking in fun. Members are among the lucky few who are able to enter the Animas Museum for free; get invited to the most exclusive and fancy museum events and activities; receive the LPCHS newsletter; get discounts in the museum store; and generally get to associate with people who share your love of history.

If we were you (and we are), we would complete the membership form provided here or call the museum directly at 970.259.2402 and reserve your membership today. If you're in an all-fired hurry, (and we hope you are,) you can also join by going to our website: www.animasmuseum.org. You could be joining the ranks of the soon-to-be-[in]famous!!

La Plata County Historical Society Membership Form

New Member _____ **Renewal** _____ **Gift Membership** _____ (Gift From _____)

MEMBERSHIPS

Members receive free museum admission, a discount in the museum store, quarterly newsletter, announcements of special events and invitations to members only events

Basic 10% museum store discount

- ◇ Single - \$40
- ◇ Family - \$50
- ◇ Pioneer (individual over 65) - \$25
- ◇ Small Commercial - \$150
- ◇ Student (with valid student ID) - \$15

Enhanced 15% museum store discount

- ◇ Centennial - \$125 ◇ Corporate - \$300

Lifetime 20% museum store discount

- ◇ Otto Mears (family) - \$1800
- ◇ Chief Ouray (single) - \$1200

Name _____

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I would like to make an additional donation of \$ _____ to the:

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Please make checks payable to LPCHS and send with this form to:
 LPCHS P.O. Box 3384 Durango CO 81302

*Answer to Morse Code headline on page 11 is "History is Fun"

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