

SMOKY HILL EXPRESS

Elbert County Historical Society & Museum Newsletter

FALL 2016

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THE MUSEUM IS CLOSED FOR THE WINTER. REOPENING SUNDAY, MAY 28, 2017!

UPCOMING EVENTS

Eastern Colorado Museums & Historical Societies Meeting
Saturday, April 29, 10:00 am
Location to be announced

Spring Meeting and Program Volunteer Orientation
Saturday, May 20, 10:00 am
Elbert County Museum Assembly Room

Elbert County Museum 2017 Opening Day
Sunday, May 28, 1:00 - 4:00 pm

Pioneer Fourth Celebration
Tuesday, July 4, 10:00 am - 3:00 pm
Elbert County Museum Grounds

Annual Membership Meeting
Saturday, September 9, 10:00 am
Elbert County Museum Assembly Room



GENTSCH DIORAMAS RENOVATION

The Elbert County Historical Society & Museum is looking forward to its 2017 Opening Day and the public unveiling of the latest addition to the **Gentsch Dioramas** exhibit. Over the last few years volunteers have built new cabinets to encase the dioramas which relate to the travel and hardships endured by the pioneers on the Smoky Hill Trail during the Gold Rush of 1859. These dioramas were built by Hank Gentsch, an artist with extraordinary talent. Hank, after being paralyzed from the waist down in a car accident as a young man, found his niche in life by carving the figures to put into the dioramas that he built. Altogether he built about fifty dioramas. Most of them depict the history of mining in Colorado.



The final piece to this exhibit is the addition of a life-size scenic diorama of the Russellville area -just west of Elbert County where gold was found in the winter of 1858 (this

discovery helped fuel the gold fever of the Gold Rush of 1859). This closing vignette to the trail-traveling story contains two Gentsch dioramas which relate to mining, uniquely incorporated within the scenery along with a life sized man (also carved by Hank) panning for gold.

This new exhibit was designed by Rand and Karen Hood of **Visual West**. Rand and Karen specialize in working with museums to create splendid exhibits and displays. The display was built off site and then transported to the museum this Fall where it was put into place. Mark your calendars for opening day May 28!

FOR GIVING MADE EASY, DONATE ONLINE!

Visit **Elbert County Historical Society and Museum** on ColoradoGives.org, a year-round online giving website that features more than 2,000 Colorado charities. Learn about our programs, how we are helping our community, and donate online directly to us. Tell your friends and family -- no more stamps, no more envelopes -- simply donate online.

Go to www.ColoradoGives.org and enter **Elbert County Historical Society and Museum** in the search field. Or, simply click on the Donate Now link from our website. From all of us at **Elbert County Historical Society and Museum**, thank you for your support! ColoradoGives.org is made possible by Community First Foundation.



ELBERT COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY & MUSEUM

Joe Martell
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Elbert County Historical Society
515 Comanche Street ▪ PO Box 43
Kiowa, Colorado 80117

ElbertCountyMuseum.org

The Elbert County Museum is owned and operated by the Elbert County Historical Society, a 501 (c)(3) non-profit organization.

MISSION STATEMENT

To record and maintain the history of Elbert County, Colorado from the earliest settlement.

To work for the establishment of appropriate vaults and archives for the preservation of original manuscripts, documents, photographs and artifacts which may come into the possession of the Society.

To maintain, preserve and house the above stated articles in the Elbert County Museum.

WHO AM I?

- What town did I grow up in?
 - Englewood, CO
 - Englewood, IL
 - Englewood, NJ
- Which Infantry Division did I serve in during WWII?
 - 24th
 - 25th
 - 27th
- What vocation did I not try?
 - Archaeologist
 - Artist
 - Author



Answers on page 5



MEMBERSHIP LEVELS

Individual - \$15

Student/Senior - \$8

Family - \$20

Volunteer - Donation of six (6) hours of volunteer time or participate in two (2) functions and/or events.

SEASON SPONSORSHIPS

Museum Season Sponsorships are collected annually and expire at the end of each calendar year. Sponsorships support the general operating fund, new and permanent exhibits, development of educational initiatives and public programs, and the historic museum building and its infrastructure.

Season sponsorships are available at four different levels and are identified by icons of early Elbert County industry

Locomotive -

Contributions of \$200 cash/merchandise or more will receive:

- acknowledgment as a Season Sponsor on all exhibit and event flyers (including Pioneer Fourth)
- recognition on signage inside the museum and at the Pioneer Fourth
- inclusion in the newsletter(s) and
- on our website

Ponderosa Pine -

Contributions of \$100 cash/merchandise or more will receive:

- recognition on signage inside the museum
- inclusion in the newsletter(s) and
- on our website

Windmill -

Contributions over \$25 cash/merchandise will receive:

- recognition on signage inside the museum
- inclusion in the newsletter(s)

Cultivator -

Contributions of \$250 cash or more through the **East Central Enterprise Zone**** will receive:

- acknowledgment as a Season Sponsor on all exhibit and event flyers (including Pioneer Fourth)
- recognition on signage inside the museum and at the Pioneer Fourth
- inclusion in the newsletter(s) and
- on our website

****East Central Enterprise Zone**

By making a \$250 or more cash donation, contributors receive **25% of that amount as a credit against their state tax liability (i.e.: \$250 donation = \$62.50 credit)**. The contribution also may be itemized on their federal tax return.

For additional details on the different levels of [membership](#) or [sponsorship](#), forms can be picked up at the museum's visitors desk or printed off our website at ElbertCountyMuseum.org.

2016 SEASON HIGHLIGHTS

This year the Elbert County Historical Society celebrated its 60th Anniversary!

The year began with a February meeting and program hosted by the **Elizabeth Library** and featured Douglas County History Research Center Librarian, **Shaun Boyd**.



The next few months flew by as exhibits were created in anticipation of opening day. This year's exhibits included a look back on ECHS through the years, Dollhouses, Miniatures, and **Paul Gallaway's Matchbox Car Collection**

In June, we helped celebrate **Mountain View Electric Association's 75th Anniversary!**

Our annual Pioneer Fourth Celebration welcomed many new and familiar faces. Musicians **Duane and Billie Owens** and **Luke Heirendt** returned this year to entertain the crowd, as did auctioneer **Lee Benjamin** and pioneer artisan **Judy Glaser**. A new attraction this year was the **Mile High Chapter Model T Ford Club**. Special thanks to all the volunteers who helped make the day possible!

In September, we joined the **Town of Kiowa** in celebrating *Cities and Towns Week* with a reception and history program at the museum.

Lastly, we are very appreciative of our Season Sponsors. This year we had 60 individual, business and corporate sponsors! In addition to participating in the **East Central Enterprise Zone**, this Fall we also joined in **Colorado Gives Day**.



FRIENDS OF THE MUSEUM

Thanks to all our friends who were 2016 museum hosts, they include: **Darrel & Shirley Abbey, Monty Ashliman, Diane Carpenter, Terry Courtright, Doris Ehmann, Jan Erker, Maylois Fraley & Charolette Mundy, Harold Heckman, Lucy Hoffhines, Betty Hood, Ric & Katee Kolm, Ellen Lancaster, Jim & Carla Martell, John & Sherry Metli, Helena Miller, Marge Mottinger, Margie Musgrave, Paul Nasrallah, Patsy North, Verena Nelson, Sylva Pemberton, Cecil & Phylis Pugh, Hank & Donna Smith and Dick & Karen Wehrman.**

The board of directors appreciates the dedication of all our faithful hosts. If you would be interested in being a museum host in 2017, please call **Carla Martell** at 303.621.2229.



EASTERN COLORADO MUSEUMS & HISTORICAL SOCIETIES MEETING

On October 8, 2016, the **Eastern Colorado Museums and Historical Societies (ECM&HS)** met at the Highlands Ranch Mansion for their 2016 Fall Meeting. This gathering of ECM&HS consisted of representatives from the: **Arriba Museum, Bailey Saddleland Museum, Castle Rock Historical Society and Museum, Cherry Creek Valley Historical Society, Cheyenne Wells Old Jail Museum and Mountain States Telephone & Telegraph, Elbert County Historical Society, Highlands Ranch Historical Society, Historic Douglas County Inc., Historic Littleton, Inc., Larkspur Historical Society, Parker Area Historical Society, and Roxborough Area Historical Society.**

The **Highlands Ranch Historical Society** hosted the event and arranged for docents to take members of the group on an interesting and enjoyable tour of the mansion. The more than 120-year-old building, known as the Highlands Ranch Mansion, is the namesake of the community of Highlands Ranch. First built in 1891, the historic mansion has been home to some of Denver's more notable families including cattle barons, oil tycoons, prominent Denver socialites, as well as political and business leaders who have helped create the Colorado we know today. After an 18-month renovation, the mansion is now a focal point in the Highlands Ranch community where residents can gather, celebrate and experience the lifestyle of years gone by at this western estate. It is open to the public on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 9 AM to 2 PM year-round.

Following the mansion tour, the group gathered for lunch at the Douglas County Sheriff's substation in Highlands Ranch where the program and business meeting took place, and moderated by ECHS President **Joe Martell**. **Stefanie Baltzell**, Preservation Grants Outreach Specialist with History Colorado/State Historic Fund presented a program on the grants available through History Colorado - State Historic Fund. A round table discussion followed Stefanie's presentation, during which time a representative from each organization in attendance gave a summary of their group's 2016 activities.

RUSSELLVILLE -A PRELUDE TO THE 1859 “PIKE’S PEAK OR BUST” GOLD RUSH

The area which eventually became Russellville was used by Plains Indians for hunting. Travelers on the early 1800’s Trapper’s Trail also used the area as a resting place during their hunting and trapping expeditions. By the late 1850’s the trail predominately known as the Cherokee Trail, ran north from the Santa Fe Trail, coming through the Russellville area and proceeded on along the Front Range to forts and trails in Wyoming.

The first reported gold in what later became Colorado was found by explorer James Purcell as he collected gold nuggets along the South Platte River. Through the 1830’s and 1840’s there were a few sporadic reports of gold recovered by trappers and other travelers on the Cherokee Trail. The California Gold Rush of 1849 created the opportunity for gold seekers to pass along the Front Range enroute to the northern trails to California. One party from the gold district of Auraria, Georgia passed through the Front Range and noted the potential for gold in the streams that flowed from the mountains.

Upon hearing these reports a participant in the gold fields of California named William “Green” Russell traveled from Georgia to Bent’s Fort in 1858. After leaving Bent’s Fort for the confluence of Cherry Creek and the South Platte River, they panned minor amounts of gold from a stream while camped in the Black Forest during the winter of 1858. The rumors of this gold discovery quickly spread contributing to the great “Pike’s Peak or Bust” gold rush. During 1859 thousands of people flooded the Rocky Mountains region of the yet to be designated Territory of Colorado. The Russell brothers did not stay there but went on to establish Auraria at the confluence of Cherry Creek and the South Platte River and search for gold in the mountains to the west.

By the end of 1859, Russellville was a small boomtown and for a few exciting months Russellville was thought to be the gold rush capital. The town rose along a small creek which would become known as Russellville Gulch (not to be confused with Russell Gulch outside of Central City, also named for William Russell and his discovery of gold there). Russell’s discovery of a few flakes of gold brought a rush of prospectors to the area. Abounding with promise,

Russellville was a busy place as a tent city with placer gold diggings. Soon some more permanent buildings were erected including a hotel, an ice house, a spring house and a stage barn, but the gold was too sparse to make any fortunes. The real gold rush began in spring of 1859 with the discovery of rich deposits in the Central Rockies to the northwest and Russellville’s boom abruptly busted. Nearly deserted, the settlement survived for a time as a passenger station and a lumber mill center which supplied lumber for construction in the new communities of Auraria and Denver City.

During the Civil War, when the gold rush slowed down, it was suspected that Russellville was becoming a gathering place for Confederate sympathizers. Early in 1862, William Gilpin, the appointed governor of the newly formed Colorado Territory, had some forty men arrested at Russellville believing they were headed to Texas to join the Confederate forces under General Sibley. This army was heading north from El Paso, Texas to get gold from Colorado to replenish the depleted Confederate war funds. The army had reached as far north as Glorieta Pass before being defeated and General Sibley turned back.

In the summer of 1864, Jim Reynolds and his gang of Texas outlaws began raiding ranches, stage stations and mail coaches in South Park near Fairplay to send money back to help fund the Confederacy. After several skirmishes with local posses some were captured and sent to Denver where it was determined to send them to Fort Lyons for a military trial. At Russellville the five were shot either while trying to escape or possibly were executed.

After the Civil War, Russellville continued as a lumber supplier with as many as six sawmills operating in the area during the 1880’s. It’s location within the Black Forest provided plenty of Ponderosa Pine lumber for the booming Colorado economy. Eventually the hopeful boom town faded into history as a ghost town as did a great many of the mining boom towns, some without hardly leaving a trace of their existence. Russellville became part of the private Russellville Ranch.

In 2004 Douglas County designated the ranch a historical landmark. Today the 35 acre parcel is owned by the Archaeological Conservancy and has monthly tours May through October.

William Greeneberry "Green" Russell (1818–1877) was born in South Carolina but moved with his family to Georgia as a small child. His father James Russell engaged in gold mining during the Georgia Gold Rush that started in 1828 and Green came of age in a local economy dominated by mining. In 1845 he married Susan Willis who was 1/8th Cherokee.

When gold was found at Sutter's Mill in 1848, a cook for Sutter's crew who was a Georgia native sent word back home enabling Russell to learn of the discovery. Russell led a couple of successful mining ventures to California which included his brothers and other Georgians including Cherokees, some of whom made the trek west overland through the Rockies.

Russell had spent his boyhood in the Cherokee country around Dahlonega, Georgia, site of the only significant gold rush east of the Mississippi, the bonanza in California sent him across the continent in 1849, and along the way panned a little gold in the Sweetwater River, in southwest Wyoming just east of the Rockies. During the next few years Russell moved restlessly-home to Georgia, back to the Pacific, then home again in 1852. Then, through his Cherokee connections Russell heard about an 1849 discovery of gold along the South Platte River at the foot of the Rocky Mountains. He organized a party to prospect along the South Platte River, setting off with his two

Continued on page 5

WHO AM I?

Continued from page 2

Answers: a) Englewood, CO, b) 25th, a) Archaeologist

Henry (Hank) C. Gentsch was the oldest of three children born to Henry R. and Barbara C. (Ross) Gentsch on September 4, 1926. He and his younger brother, Alvin and sister, Elizabeth (Liz) grew up down the street from their grandparents in Englewood, Colorado.



Eager to do his patriotic duty, Hank enlisted in the army after high school and served as a combat engineer with the 25th Infantry Division in the Pacific theater during World War Two. He finished his service to his country and returned to Colorado to seek an engineering degree at Fort Lewis A&M in Durango. In 1949, fate intervened and an automobile accident broke his back leaving him a paraplegic and confined to a wheelchair for the rest of his life.

Amazingly, Hank considered this tragic event only a temporary setback and although he would never walk again, he had full use of his upper body and over time he learned to do amazing things with his hands. With no formal training, he taught himself wood carving and soon combined that talent with his interest in history -especially the history of mining in Colorado.

Hank set about recording Colorado mining history in the form of dioramas with intricate carvings of miners and their equipment. He carefully constructed each miniature scene, complete with oil painted backdrops, tiny plants and animals; while his friend and business partner, **Joe McPhee**, built the wood cases that housed each display and wired them for electricity. The displays depicted the miners' journey across

the eastern plains to the gold fields of Colorado and their subsequent successes, or in many cases, disappointments and defeats.

Eventually the team completed so many detailed and historically accurate panels that they decided to open a mining museum in Central City in the late 1960's where they could showcase their creativity. In addition to the dioramas and text/graphic panels, they built two life-size animatronic mannequins that greeted and interacted with visitors. They opened another exhibit at Buckskin Joe, a western style theme park near Canon City.

These two venues were popular with tourists and quite successful for a number of years. When Hank and Joe made the decision to retire, they split the collection into thirds - dividing the mining dioramas between the **National Mining Museum** in Leadville and the **South Park City Museum** in Fairplay, and the trail-travel to the gold field dioramas to the **Elbert County Museum** (in subsequent years the animatronic carvings were given to the ECM as well).

In addition to his artistic livelihood, Hank authored *The McPhee Story*; a book on Joe McPhee's pioneering family who were one of the first families to homestead in the Sheephorn Valley of Middle Park, Colorado. He was also actively involved with the Denver Branch #49 annual Fleet Reserve Association (FRA) Trout Rodeo for over twenty years. The trout rodeo was a yearly fishing competition for amputees, paraplegics and physically handicapped service personnel. It took place at the Twin Cedar Lodge on the South Fork of the South Platte River west of Sedalia, and each year at the conclusion of the contest, the best sportsman was presented with a special trophy carved by Hank.

Hank Gentsch passed away January 8, 1995 and is buried beside his parents at Fairmount Cemetery.

William Russell

Continued from page 4

brothers and six companions in February 1858. They rendezvoused with Cherokee tribe members along the Arkansas River in present-day Oklahoma and continued westward along the Santa Fe Trail. Others joined the party along the way until their number reached 107. The few accounts of Russell suggest a confident man who inspired trust. In a later portrait he has a direct, drowsy-eyed look of assurance. Whatever his appeal, Russell convinced the others to stand against adversities the expedition may have presented

Upon reaching Bent's Fort, they turned to the northwest, reaching the confluence of Cherry Creek and the South Platte on May 23. The site of their initial explorations is in present-day Confluence Park in Denver. They began prospecting in the river beds, exploring Cherry Creek and nearby Ralston Creek but without success. After twenty days, several decided to return home, leaving the Russell brothers and ten other men behind. In the first week of July 1858, Green Russell and Sam Bates found a small placer deposit near the mouth of Little Dry Creek that yielded about 20 troy ounces (600 grams) of gold, the first significant gold discovery in the Rocky Mountain region.

In early 1859, Russell was drawn to the mountains by the discovery of gold in nearby Gregory Gulch. He discovered placer gold deposits in June 1859 in the valley that was soon named Russell Gulch in his honor. By the end of September, 891 men were mining gold in the gulch, and the eponymous town was built near the head of the gulch to serve the miners.

Word of gold first reached the rest of the nation when an old trader named John Cantrell who had visited the Russell diggings arrived in Kansas City in 1858 with samples to back up his story. Newspapers began to print stories of the findings, starting the Pike's Peak Gold Rush. While his mining activities were successful, the political environment turned against Green as Union men began to outnumber southerners. Green attempted to get back to Georgia but his party was first struck by smallpox and then intercepted by the Union army.

After the Civil War Russell returned to Colorado but was not as successful as he had been previously. After the death of his son John in a mining accident in 1874 he sought to gain land in the Indian Territory through his Cherokee wife. He settled there but was contemplating a return to Georgia when he became ill and died in 1877.

Wikipedia, 2016

ELBERT COUNTY MUSEUM SPONSORS

While the museum receives funds through monetary donations given at the museum and with annual historical society memberships; Season Sponsorships and the Pioneer Fourth celebration are the main areas of income which allow the Elbert County Historical Society to develop exhibits and educational opportunities and to improve and maintain the museum building. Thank you for your commitment to the educational and historical importance of the Elbert County Museum!



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ELBERT COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY & MUSEUM

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