

SPECIAL HISTORY EDITION



The Ouray County Historical Society (OCHS) thanks the Ouray County Plaindealer for their assistance in printing and distributing our newsletter.

HISTORIAN

NEWSLETTER

Winter 2021

MISSION STATEMENT:
The Ouray County Historical Society (OCHS) is dedicated to preserve, protect, procure, exhibit, and interpret whatever relates to the natural, social, and cultural history of Ouray County and the adjacent San Juan Mountain Region of Colorado.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

There are those who cannot wait to forget the year 2020!

Are you one of them? No question this past year, with the specter of COVID-19, has been like no other in recent memory. The virus has invaded and affected nearly every fiber of the world's peoples and institutions.

The Ouray County Historical Society and museum succumbed as well, having to close our doors for the first time ever due to the virus. But should we join the ranks of those who wish to forget everything about the year 2020?

The answer is NO!

We, the OCHS, are in the business of preserving history both good and bad and the remembrances of this past year, just as the year 1918 with the Spanish flu epidemic will become a teaching moment for us and generations to follow.

Continued renovation and restoration of our sub-basement, restrooms, and wheelchair ramp has now been completed. New exhibits such as the Camp Bird Diorama and the Stanislawski lamp collection have been added. New donations from Dan and Mary King chronicling the restoration of the Beaumont Hotel are now added to the Museum's collection.

Ongoing education via the Evenings of History lecture series did not stop this summer but went virtual instead. In 2021 we expect our popular lecture series to be back again in its old locale, the beautifully restored Wright Opera House.

There is always new history to be learned and not forgotten. We invite you to come, see, and experience this local history when we open our doors again in the spring of 2021.



The Ouray County Historical Society would like to thank Colorado Humanities for the CH Organization CARES Humanities Relief Grant.



Kevin Chismire

Legacy of Ouray's namesake ship lives on

In December of 1942, a little over a year after the attack on Pearl Harbor, Charles Spencer received an eye-opening press release from the U.S. Office of War Information.

Charles was then publisher, editor and owner of the Ouray County Herald. The press release he received did not bring news of Allied offensives or battles in Europe, North Africa or the South Pacific. Rather, it announced the upcoming launching of the Chief Ouray Liberty Ship, one of the first in a fleet of ocean-going cargo ships built to move men and materials to the front.

This news was sent to the publisher of a small mining town newspaper for the reason that this ship, his town, and his county shared the same name. The name, Chief Ouray, was selected by the U.S.



Kate Kellogg



Jamie DeFralva



Photo courtesy Mare Island Museum

The Chief Ouray Liberty Ship, named after the Ute Indian leader, was among a fleet of ocean-going cargo ships built to move soldiers and materials to assist the Allies during World War II. Unfortunately, the ship only lasted six months after being severely damaged by a Japanese torpedo in June 1943.

Maritime Commission. Although any group or individual who raised \$2 million in war bond sales could propose a Liberty Ship name, the selection process was competitive. According to the press release, the Commission chose Chief Ouray from among

hundreds of names proposed by Colorado children.

Charles Spencer was the grandfather of Jamie DeFralva, a long-time resident of Ouray and OCHS volunteer. She discovered the Liberty Ship press materials while sorting through her late grandfa-

ther's papers and files. Although she believes he ran the story in the Herald, a search of the OCHS newspaper archives didn't turn up the issues in which it would have appeared.

SHIP CONTINUES ON PAGE 2

VICE PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Even in pandemic, we're committed to preserving Ouray County history

2020 has been a year of change — changes in the way we work, shop, socialize and live our everyday lives. OCHS has had to adapt.

Amongst all this change, one thing has remained the same — our mission. It is the mission of OCHS to "procure, preserve, protect, exhibit and interpret whatever may relate to the history of Ouray County and the adjacent San Juan Mountain region."

With the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic in February/March 2020, OCHS reluctantly made the decision not to open the museum this year in order to protect our staff, volunteers and visitors, many of whom find themselves among the most vulnerable (e.g. 60+).

While this decision accomplished our goal of keeping everyone safe, it did have its consequences. OCHS lost income from museum admissions and the retail sales associated with such visits, nearly a third of our normal income. Nevertheless, we have survived and adapted but with substantially less income.

Despite the above, OCHS was



Tom Hillhouse



Photo courtesy Ouray County Historical Society

One of the many challenges the Ouray County Historical Society dealt with in 2020 was the relocation of the diorama of the Camp Bird Mine structures from the Ouray Visitor Center to the museum. Volunteers had to cut the diorama in two and reassemble it at the museum.

successful in transferring some, but not all, of its popular Evenings of History programs from in person presentations at the Historic Wright Opera House to digital Zoom presentations.

Our procurement efforts have continued a pace with substantial and significant donations. Among the most significant:

Dan and Mary King graciously donated artifacts, plans, awards, etc. related to their restoration of the Beaumont Hotel and asso-

ciated Ouray properties. The Beaumont restoration not only resulted in their being awarded the Preserve American Presidential Award presented by President Bush in 2004, but served as the forerunner to virtually all the significant restorations that have occurred in Ouray in the last two decades — among them: the Historic Wright Opera House, Story Block Building, Citizens State Bank, The Columbus Building, and most recently the Ouray County

Courthouse complex.

Despite COVID, our research efforts, archival and library are functioning well, just without the in-person interactions which have been so rewarding in the past.

Later in the summer we were notified by the City of Ouray that we had a very limited period to remove the Camp Bird Diorama built and donated by John Uhles that had been on display at the Ouray Visitor Center. The problem? The diorama is massive and entirely protected by a glass case. Additionally, there was only one space in the entire museum that was large enough to display it, but in order to get it there the glass case needed to be removed and the diorama itself cut in two and then reassembled at its new site in the museum. We are happy to report that the diorama is now safely at the museum and well on the way to be available for viewing for our 2021 season visitors.

In late September, the 150-year-old plaster ceiling in our director's office partially collapsed. It has since been repaired, but this unexpected and unbudgeted expense, coupled with our loss of admissions income and retail sales, continues to add to our ongoing struggles.

We look forward to seeing you in 2021 as we celebrate our 50th anniversary.

Donations provide boost during tough year

2020 has been a very difficult time for the Ouray County Historical Society. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic the museum did not open in 2020 and we canceled all in person meetings. Even though we were closed, the public continued to donate wonderful items to the museum. There were hundreds of donations and I can't acknowledge all of them but here are a few examples.

- Mary Cockle donated a large set of material used in the preparation of Roger Henn's book "In Journeyings Often: A Story of Ouray Told Through its First Church."
- Elwood Gregory donated a large set of Ouray County photos, Ouray High School items, and other historical items related to the history of Ouray County.
- Kathleen Jurgens donated, on behalf of her mother Elizabeth A. Noon, two items belonging to Father James Gibbons who served Ouray's St. Patrick's Church from



Don Paulson

1880-1892. These are an engraved scissors and a commemorative ribbon pin with an attached circular brass fob with a photo of Father Gibbons on one side and a photo of the Church of Annunciation in Leadville, Colorado on the other side. It is dated 1902. Father Gibbons was Elizabeth Noon's great uncle. These items are displayed along with a cane engraved with Father Gibbons name.

- Mary and Dan King donated a large collection of items relating to the restoration of the Beaumont Hotel and the Scott Humphries building next to the Beaumont.



Dan and Mary King

These items include Photographic documentation during the restoration, historic photos, newspaper and magazine articles on a local, state and national level, correspondence between Doris Gregory and the Kings, architectural drawings, awards packets, and items found in the building during restoration. We plan a special exhibit of these items for summer 2022.

- Victor Gregory donated several copies of the Ouray Herald and The Ridgway Sun from the 1920s and assorted books, photos, and other items relating to Ouray historic events.



John Tjossem (left) Victor Gregory

Museum welcomes new photo collections

Vanoli Collection

Last fall Linda Bruno, a resident of New Jersey, contacted the Society concerning a collection of photos from the Vanoli family. Mrs. Bruno is the great granddaughter of Dominick Vanoli. Her mother, who recently passed away, was Eva Byma (Baima) and her grandmother, Caterina. Linda remembers as a girl visiting her mother's aunts Minnie and Mary who still lived in the Roma Saloon after it ceased operation. This important collection includes never-before-seen photos of Tony, Dominick, John and their families. The pictures of the famous Gold Belt Theater and the Roma Saloon document an era of Ouray when the Red-Light District flour-

ished. The collection also includes photos of other saloons, mines, and businesses located in Ouray and Telluride.

Alfred King Collection

Russell King, from Richmond California, visited the museum in February 2010. He noticed the Museum's exhibit, "The Blind Poet of Colorado - Alfred Castner King." "Cass" King was Russell's grandfather. Russell donated first editions of Alfred King's poetry book "Mountain Idylls and Other Poems" as well as a collection of Alfred's family photos to the OCHS, and last year, he donated more historic photos.

Alfred worked as an assayer at the Caliope Mine north of Ouray. On March 17,

1900, one day after his 26th birthday, three boxes of caps exploded, permanently blinding Alfred. Of the accident he wrote that it, "banished the light of the Colorado sun from my eyes forever." He spent months traveling from hospital to hospital while doctors tried but failed to restore his vision and correct his periodic episodes of deafness. Alfred had written poetry before his accident and was an ardent student of classic literature. After he regained strength and after composing more poems, his mother helped him organize his poetry into collections



Gail Saunders

for publication. His two books, "Mountain Idylls" (1901) and "The Passing of the Storm" (1907), were written in the romantic style of the era. He wrote of suicide, recovery, mining, and mountain vistas. This was the beginning of his long career spent traveling across the United States as a performer and lecturer while playing his flute and selling his books. Newspapers referred to him as "the blind bard of Colorado."

Alfred was born in Michigan and his parents moved to Colorado living in Buena Vista before settling in Ouray. Around 1904, he married Florence Wheeler. The couple settled in Fruita, Colorado, where they raised three children, Alfred Jr., Virgil, and Florence Edith.

Alfred passed away on August 30, 1941, in Grand Junction, Colorado.

Ouray County Historical Society



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Excerpts from a pair of poems by Alfred King:

"Grandeur"

I stood at sunrise, on the topmost part
Of lofty mountain, massively sublime;
A pinnacle of trachyte, seamed and scarred
By countless generations' ceaseless war
And struggle with the restless elements;
A rugged point, which shot into air,
As by ambition or desire impelled
To pierce the eternal precincts of the sky.

"The Miner"

Thus the battle he fights for his daily bread;
Thus our gold and our silver, our iron and lead,
Cost us lives, as true as our blood is red,
And probably always will.

BECOME A MEMBER!

Your membership is vital — especially during this time — so that the Society can maintain not only our historic museum building but our new research center.

Name (s): _____

Organization (If Business Member): _____

Mailing Address: _____

City, State, Zip Code: _____

Phone Number: _____

Email: _____

Amount Paid: _____ By (check one) Cash _____ Check _____ CC _____

MEMBERSHIP LEVEL

☐ Silver King \$30 (Individual) ☐ National Belle \$250-\$499

☐ Guston \$40 (Family) ☐ Yankee Girl \$500-\$999

☐ Revenue \$50-\$99 ☐ Camp Bird \$1,000-Up

☐ Grizzly Bear \$100-\$249 ☐ Business Member \$50-Up

SHIP

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

But multiple sources document the Dec. 28, 1942, launching of the Chief Ouray Liberty Ship from a Richmond, California, shipyard. Those sources include the Maritime Administration of the U.S. Department of Transportation and Shipbuildinghistory.com as well as the National Museum of the U.S. Navy's website. Like other Liberty Ships, the hull of the Chief Ouray was built from scrap metal salvaged by American citizens, including many school children.

The story of this particular ship really begins with a remarkable little boy named Harold Sheldon, "second grader and sole pupil" at Pioneer School in Westplains, Logan County, Colorado, as described in the wartime press release. Harold collected 18 tons of scrap for the country's salvage campaign, winning first-place honors among schools in Colorado. As a result of his efforts, Harold became something of a young celebrity. He is pictured in the April 1943 issue of Boy's Life magazine smiling proudly in front of an American flag.

Harold and two other students from the second- and third-place winning Colorado schools represented their state at the Chief Ouray's launching off the California coast. Harold's address at the event, as quoted in the press release, offered a biography of Chief Ouray and detailed the chief's achievements as a peacemaker between the Utes and the white men. Harold concluded by explaining the Ute origins of Chief Ouray's name.

"His name means 'Arrow.' To you who man this ship through treacherous waters, let me express the wish in which all Americans join me: May you always reach

your port of call straight as an arrow and return unharmed," he said. "We wish you God speed and good luck!"

Unfortunately, the ship's luck only lasted about six months. A Japanese torpedo stuck the Chief Ouray in June 1943. It damaged the ship so badly that another U.S. Navy ship had to abandon and sink her by gunfire near the Solomon Islands in the South Pacific. When Jamie DeFreval's son served in the U.S. Navy, he travelled to the area where the Chief Ouray was sunk. "He thought it would be neat if the Navy could raise the wrecked ship but it never happened," she said.

More than 2,500 Liberty Ships were built on a mass-production scale between 1941 and 1945. Each ship was designed to carry 10,000 long tons of cargo. The Chief Ouray was one of five Liberty Ships named in honor of Indian chiefs, according to historian Cynthia Becker, who authored the book Chipeta, Ute Peacemaker.

Built in just 31 days by Permanente Metals Corporation, the Chief Ouray went into active service with the U.S. Navy on Jan. 23, 1943. Once in service, it was renamed the USS Deimos AK-78 after one of the moons of Mars. The Deimos received a World War II Battle Star for its service.

Only three of the 2,710 Liberty Ships are operational today. Those that weren't lost to battle or naval mines were converted for commercial shipping uses. A few have been completely repurposed, such as one ship that serves as a cannery on Kodiak Island, Alaska.

Yet the Chief Ouray Liberty Ship's legacy survives for alert collectors and eBay watchers. In 2011, the U.S. Postal Service issued commemorative stamps celebrating U.S. vessels including Liberty Ships. Chief Ouray's name and unmistakable image appears on one of the first-day covers for that stamp issue.

The Vanoli brothers: How two Italian immigrants influenced a mining town

In the mid 1880s two Italian immigrants, John and Dominick Vanoli, exerted a major influence on the growing mining town of Ouray, Colorado. The younger brother, John, was present in Ouray in 1884 while Dominick arrived in 1885. John was the more volatile of the pair, often getting crosswise the law. He was also the financial leader of the two, taking advantage of the chances for making money. He purchased the property on block 8 fronting on Main Street, taking over what was thought to be the Grand Pacific, also known as the 220. The property on the two lots had passed through many owners so that it is unknown when the Grand Pacific was erected on lots 21 and 22, but this purchase was the beginning of the Vanolis' rise in fortune.



Glenda Moore

The Grand Pacific had been described in a local newspaper as a two-story building with gambling and liquor downstairs and rooms for the prostitutes upstairs. After the purchase this property became known as Vanoli's Boarding House or the 220 Dive. The establishment often received notice in the local newspaper with shooting events or general rowdiness. Ouray was a rough mining town with its brothels and saloons, and Vanoli's place became one of the wildest. In 1887 John bought lot 20 on block 8 which had a vacant building on it. By buying this lot, he acquired the space to build the Gold Belt Theatre on the west end of lots 20, 21, 22. With the presence of liquor, gambling, and girls, Vanoli's 220 made the newspapers with the shootings, quarreling, and stabbings that took place there. All the property was in John's name so it is probable that Dominick and his sons were involved in managing the acquisitions.

The Gold Belt Theatre was built in 1887 or 1888 and operated during John's incarceration in Canon City. The theatre became the center of entertainment in Ouray with good bands and vaudeville acts appearing on the stage. Our local historian, Doris Gregory, wrote a book called *Ouray's Era of Bars and Brothels* and had the opportunity to photograph the interior before the building was torn down in 1981. She described the business as having a high ceiling, rose-pattern wallpaper, a sizeable floor space, an appropriate stage at one end, and private loges on the second level. Miners coming in to Ouray could buy a dance with one of the girls, purchase liquor, gamble, and go upstairs with a prostitute. The entertainment part of the business even drew local citizens in to enjoy performances as there was nothing offered similar until the Wright Opera House was built.

The year 1888 saw a change in John's life when he shot and killed Sam Best. On this occasion and another later, he seemed to shoot first and not worry about the consequences. John was tried, found guilty of voluntary manslaughter, and sentenced to two years in the Canon City penitentiary. In June of 1888 he was taken to Canon City. However, David Day's controversial newspaper, *The Solid Muldoon*, began to encourage citizens to circulate a petition for the governor to pardon Vanoli. This was a reversal of Day's initial response to the shooting. The petition circulated and John became a free man only six months after his conviction. In April 1895 he shot another man, Ed Leggit, but this man survived the four bullets in him. A hearing was held but the attorney for the county, after hearing the evidence, declared that it would be a waste of time and money to try Vanoli.

On the front of lot 20, Vanoli built the Roma Saloon; a year later he purchased a saloon in the town of Red Mountain and owned a dance house in Telluride. Unfortunately, two events occurred that impacted his businesses: on April, 1895 after John shot Ed Leggit, the town responded to the shooting by closing the Gold Belt Theatre and several similar establishments. The citizenry was always



Photos courtesy Ouray County Historical Society

Top: The interior of Gold Belt Theater. The saloon was built in the alley near Eighth Avenue and was demolished in 1972.

Above: The Roma Saloon was located where the Skol Gallery is today on Main Street. Tony Vanoli stands in front on the left.

Right: The funeral of Dominick Vanoli. Dominick lies in his casket surrounded by his children.



trying to have the saloons and brothels shut down. Vanoli was cleared of the charge in case of the Leggit shooting, but later in the same disastrous year he lost his saloon in Red Mountain when the town burned. From records it appears that he was also having financial problems.

In December of 1895, Vanoli visited a friend in California. According to the source there, John had received extremely bad news from a doctor, and during the night he shot himself. It was announced in a California paper that he had died of a heart attack. Because Vanoli was an infamous character in Ouray, rumors abounded about his death: he had gone insane and killed himself; he had the symptoms of incurable syphilis; or he had been shot by an unknown party. By rumor it was suggested that there were two bullet holes in the body when it arrived at the mortuary in Ouray. In earlier days there were rumors that John was an agent for the Black Hand. Consequently, upon his death and upon the rumors flying about two bullet holes, it was inferred that he

had been killed by that organization. It must be remembered that in the 1800s until late in the twentieth century the mention of the name of the Black Hand was like using the specter of the boogie man. However, no proof exist that John was representative of the organization.

When John shot Leggit, he must have thought that he would be going back to prison so he transferred his property to Dominick. Upon John's death Dominick became the owner of all the property, but some of John's assets had to be sold to pay off debts. Tony bought the Roma Saloon at auction, and that building remained a family holding until the death of Minnie and Mary. Tony also owned a cabin at the north end of Oak Street in Ouray, which remains although modified by successive owners. As for Dominick's abilities, he subsequently increased the holdings of his family in town and out of state and was spoken of as respected in his obituary. Unfortunately, the movement for moral reform began to gather strength, and it would eventually impact the pleasure palaces and saloons in the

mining camps. The beginning to the new century would bring a decline in the number of saloons, especially when the state of Colorado was early to prohibit the sale of alcohol to the public.

Dominick's family, two sons, Tony and Barney, and three daughters, Mary, Minnie, and Kate, had joined him earlier in Ouray, and his wife Maria, in 1901, but she died from typhoid a year after she arrived in town. All of Dominick's children stayed in the area except Caterina known as Kate. Tony and Barney joined their father in managing the saloons, with Tony being responsible for the management of the acquisitions in Telluride. The local newspapers reported his many trips between Ouray and Telluride. Meanwhile Barney was helping his father in Ouray but was spending time on mining claims. Under Dominick's ownership little trouble was reported at the Vanoli saloons and dance house. Perhaps Dominick was of a calmer disposition than John. Dominick died in 1910 shortly after his youngest daughter Kate married Peter Baima. He did not live to see prohibition enacted in Colorado in 1916 or the burning of the Gold Belt Theatre in Telluride in 1911. The 18th Amendment, which was passed to prevent the sale of strong drink, caused the closing of many saloons and saw the creation of devious ways of circumventing this law. Both Tony and Barney obtained a "soft drinks" license, a clandestine way to serve liquor.

In addition to all the family town properties, John and Dominick had been interested in mining, and like the miners of the time, they worked their mine claims sporadically according to weather and legal requirements to hold the claims. Later Tony and Barney listed their occupation in the 1920 census as miners. There were reports in the local press about the two going out to work at the mines. Probably Minnie and Mary were in charge of property management while the brothers were out in the mountains as the sisters were living on the premises.

Barney made the news when he was tried for the attempted murder of Peter Thompson in 1901, but his trial ended in a hung jury. Then in 1911 he was charged with assault and battery during a meeting concerned with his father's estate. His sister Minnie's representative was the object of his action. Minnie was trying to get her share of the inheritance and had Fred Scala represent her. Barney had a grudge against Scala from a previous settlement hearing. No outcome of the charge is known, but it appears that Barney had an attitude like his uncle John.

Tony died in 1928 and Barney in 1931, neither of them marrying, although there was a blurb in the Montrose Daily Press about "Mr. and Mrs. Barney Vanoli." But the censuses listed Barney as single. Minnie and Mary never married and survived until 1967, hanging on to the Roma Saloon for their home. Minnie was the social member of the family, listed as an officer in the Pocahontas council in 1902, the group being an auxiliary to the Red Men organization. She also was responsible for a voting location, possibly in the Roma Saloon, as she lived there over the years. However, her name was on some family property in Telluride, and she received papers of complaint in 1916 that her business was among those running a house of prostitution in the red light district. That business may have been part of her inheritance or as the case often was, possessions were recorded in a female's name as the male in the family was often away.

Kate, the youngest daughter, lived with her first husband in Boulder County, Colorado, and when Peter Baima died, she married Peter Fossat in 1922. She had four daughters, Pierina Sally Baima, Stella Baima, Eva Baima and Julia Fossat. Recently the Ouray County Historical Society photo archivist, Gail Saunders, received Vanoli family photographs, an archival treasure. Until this event there were no photos of the family who was such an interesting and influential part of early Ouray history.

San Juan postal history

In today's environment it is hard to conceive of a time that instant communication was not possible. But for over two centuries in the U.S. mail has served as the longest surviving form of mass communication still in existence. That accomplishment has a rich history not only on a national scale, but on a local one as well. Primarily, postal history is perceived to be collecting postmarks and covers from long discontinued post offices, and while that is interesting and important, it is much more than that as we will see.



Tom Hillhouse

The postal history of Ouray and the San Juan Mountain Region is, of course, closely tied to the development of its counties and towns as commercial, mining and ranching centers of the region.

Originally the area that is today's Ouray County was part of La Plata County. Ouray's first post office was established on Oct. 28, 1875, even before Ouray was incorporated as a town or Colorado established as a state. Steven S. Moore was named postmaster. This office lasted until March 20, 1876, when it was discontinued. By May 9, 1876, Ouray was in San Juan County and its post office was re-established. Ouray remained in San Juan County until Jan. 18, 1877, when Ouray County was formally established, becoming the first county designated by the newly formed Colorado legislature. (Colorado became the 38th state in the U.S. on August 1, 1876, during the administration of President Grant.)

The history of the formation of the counties in the San Juans has resulted in periods of time when the current towns of Rico, Dolores County and Telluride, San Miguel County were actually located in Ouray County. For two years from the founding of Rico in 1879 until the formation of Dolores County from Ouray County in February 1881 some Rico postmarks say: "Rico, Ouray CO, Colo." The same goes for Telluride from its founding in 1878 to February 1883 when San Miguel County was formed from Ouray County. ("Telluride, Ouray CO Colorado")

Coinciding with the establishment of the first post office in Ouray in October 1875, Otto Mears acquired the initial contract for bringing mail into the region, that would become Ouray County, from the Sa-



Above: Sam's Post Office (1903-1950) was located on Dallas Divide.

Right: A mail carrier on skis pauses to look at the Red Mountain mines. Notice the Yankee Girl headframe in the distance.

Bottom: The Los Piños Post Office was established in 1877 and erected on the Los Piños Ute Indian Agency near present-day Colona.

Photos courtesy Ouray County Historical Society

guache-Lake City areas. The stories of mail delivery in the fall and winter of 1875-1876 are legendary, extolling the use of dog teams, skis, snow shoes and trudging on foot through waist-deep snow in order to get the mail through.

1875 also marked the year the Los Piños Indian Agency was moved to the Uncompahgre Valley just north of present day Colona. The agency had previously been located in the mountains near Cochetopa Pass in the Saguache area. Mears' mail contract was to deliver the mail from the Saguache area to the new agency location on the Uncompahgre, from which it would be distributed throughout the area. Thus, the Los Piños Agency became the second post office in Ouray County. (Feb. 23, 1877-Jan. 13, 1881, shortly before the Sept. 1, 1881, removal of the Uncompahgre Utes to Utah.)

The third named post office in Ouray County, "Hot Springs," was established May 4, 1877,

and discontinued Aug. 28, 1879. It was to be located "on unsurveyed land (actually still Ute land in Uncompahgre Park) eight miles north of Ouray and sixteen miles south of the Los Piños Indian Agency, one half mile east of the Uncompahgre River, on route 38157 from Barnum to Ouray with one mail delivery per week." Otto Mears was the mail contractor and William Stoddard was to be the postmaster. Six months later (October 22, 1877) Mr. Stoddard went on to become the postmaster of Ouray. There are no known post marks from the Hot Springs post office.

In addition to the opportunity to collect post marks and covers from each of the known post offices in the area (all 38 of them), a study of postal history can lead one to try to identify the locations of these long past post office locations. This is not as easy as it might seem, especially with respect to the tiny, short-lived ones which are often the point of contention among postal historians. It was not unusual to establish post offices at the ranch or mine of the person willing to be postmaster. For such locations, if the postmaster moved so did the post office.

One of the more interesting location debates has centered around the location of the Ruby City post office (May 17, 1878-July 31, 1879), which interestingly enough was the first mining camp post office in the county. Those not familiar with the actual geography of Ouray County located Ruby City on the upper reaches of Cow Creek. This location was based on the fact that Ruby City appeared at its Cow Creek location on several maps of the time (including Otto Mears' map of his toll roads and several well known Colorado maps, Nell's 1885 map and Crofutt's 1885 Grip-sack guide). The April 28, 1878 U.S. Post

Office Geographical Site Location Report places Ruby City on "unsurveyed land, with Ouray being 7 miles in a southwesterly direction from the proposed post office at Ruby City." This combination of inaccurate maps (the mislocation of Ruby City on these maps may have been due to the fact that in order to protect copyrights, some map makers typically included an error in their maps so that the error would appear on copies as well) and the transposition in the official location report of the location of Ouray has probably led to the confusion. Ouray is not seven miles southwest of Ruby City, but Ruby City is seven miles southwest of Ouray. The official location report goes on, however, to erase any question as to its location: "the proposed post office will be seven miles from said river (Uncompahgre) and on the west side of Canon Creek." Andrew W. Richardson was to be postmaster. Three months after the post office at Ruby City was closed and about a mile down Canon Creek, a post office at Mount Sneffels was established with Andrew Richardson the former Ruby City postmaster becoming the Mount Sneffels one. In 1895 the name of the Mount Sneffels post office was shortened to Sneffels. There are no known postmarks from Ruby City.

Another mine in the Mount Sneffels mining district, the Virginus, was located in mid-1876 at an elevation of over 12,000 feet. This was before Colorado became a state and before Ouray County existed as such. The mine took a while to develop, but after H.W. Reed became its superintendent and after A.E. Reynolds and investors became involved, the Virginus became one of the best producing mines in the San Juans. It acquired a post office in August 1887 which carried the distinction of being

the highest elevation post office in the country. Its post office lasted for seven years, after which its mail was sent to Mount Sneffels. Today the Virginus is part of Ouray Silver Mines, the only active mine in the area.

A recent example of the helpfulness of postal history came about when OCHS received a research request as to the location of "Aurora" (May 10, 1880 to Feb. 19, 1884) which appeared on a relative's birth certificate. The U.S. Post Office Geographical Location Report describes the location of Aurora as follows: "no survey made, on route Number 38153 Ouray to San Miguel (Telluride) on which mail is delivered three times per week. Nearest post office Alder Creek twelve miles southwest. Proposed office to be located on west side of west fork of Dallas creek about ½ mile above its junction with the east fork." This would place it along County Road 7. However, it wasn't until we knew the names of the postmasters (Julia E. Trenchard, Joshua Trenchard and Burr Culver) that we were able to locate the actual ranches, using the Family Maps of Ouray County Colorado by Gregory A. Boyd.

Among the many archival records contained in the Society's research center in the historic Story Block Building on Main Street are the actual postmaster account records, record books, money order books, etc. from several of Ouray County's 38 post offices, including: Ouray, Ash, Plumer, Red Mountain, Portland, Sneffels, Virginus and Camp Bird. These records provide a treasure trove of information for the serious researcher and even the curious. For example, the very first postal money order issued by the Ouray post office (July 1, 1878) was issued to none other than Otto Mears.

Much more could be written regarding Ouray's postal history, especially regarding the many mining camps and ranches that had their own post offices, but space doesn't allow. For those who are interested, however, the society maintains an exhibit of postal history at its museum in the Historic Miners Hospital in Ouray.



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