

Ouray 150: The Early Years
June 27, 2026
Wright Opera House
Presented by the Ouray County Historical Society

Join us for an evening of celebration and reflection on the 150th anniversary of the City of Ouray. The board of directors of the Ouray County Historical Society will present six short glimpses into select people and events which helped shape the early days of formation and growth of what was originally known as “Uncompahgre City.”

From Baker to Begole

Augustus “Gus” Begole, and his partner John Echols are credited as being the fathers of Uncompahgre City, better known today as Ouray. How did they first arrive in the area, in 1875, and what did they find that opened the flood gates to this once, seldom visited little park? From Charles Baker's first expedition in 1860, which passed through Ouray, to the Trout, Fisherman, Cedar, Clipper and Mineral Farm discoveries in 1875, Begole put Ouray on the map. A brief history of what led to the “discovery” of Ouray.

~ Presented by Alan Todd, OCHS Archivist and local historian

Battle of the Boards

The first town meeting in Ouray was held in Hagerty's cabin, and five town trustees were selected. At their first meeting, held Oct. 4, 1876, they selected the brother of one of the trustees to be town clerk. As municipal elections are held in April, in Ouray, too, an election was held in April 1877 to determine who would hold the five trustee seats. Despite, bribes of whiskey and intimidation, the electors chose five new trustees. The “old” board, however, refused to give up their seats.

~ Presented by Kevin Chismire, President of the Board of Directors of OCHS

Ouray's William W. “Doc” Rowan (1849-1926)

Doc Rowan, a colorful and unforgettable character, moved to Ouray in 1880 at age 31. He lived through Ouray's silver mining boom and into the roaring 1920s, serving as trusted doctor and drug store owner. He held many public offices including being elected mayor in three different decades. Rowan kept a pet bear, belonged to seven lodges, played second base for the Ouray baseball team, and played an integral part in the July 4th festivities for over 20 years.

~ Presented by Don Paulson, former Curator and board member of the OCHS

Una Wheeler Whinnerah

The spectacular scenery of the northern San Juan Mountains inspired the creative Una Wheeler. She pursued photography as a hobby and profession at a time when men dominated the field. Her photos give history enthusiasts a glimpse into life in Ouray County at the turn of the last century. She used a plate-glass negative camera mounted on a tripod to photograph mines, buildings, and landscapes. Several of Una's photos were made into pictures and postcards for sale in local stores. After her marriage to Richard Whinnerah in 1902, she focused on photographing both her own and Ouray's children.

~ Presented by Gail Saunders, Treasurer and Photo Archivist for OCHS

Jesse Benton

In helping shape the early days of Ouray, Jesse Benton built the first courthouse in the county in 1877, at the corner of Seventh Ave. and Main St., and later built Benton's Hall at Sixth Ave. and Fourth St., a building that still stands today. His most memorable contribution, however, may be his stint as town

marshal, and how he brought law and order to a city that was struggling with gambling, shootings and a prosperous red light district. When he was appointed marshal, one of his strongest supporters, David Day, editor of the Solid Muldoon, said that Jesse's influence would create a “moral glow” in Ouray.

~ Presented by Glenda Moore, board member of OCHS