

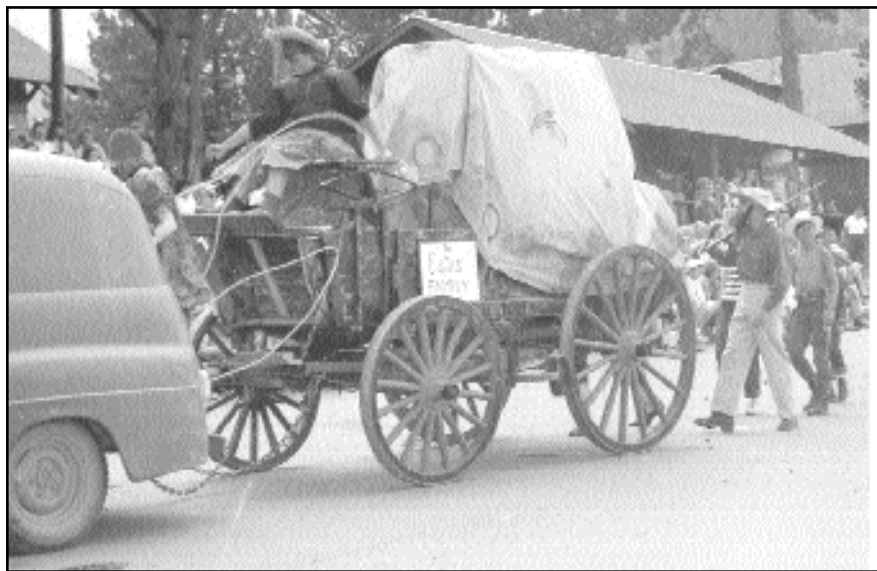
Museum Musings...

Lula W. Dorsey Museum

Summer 2002

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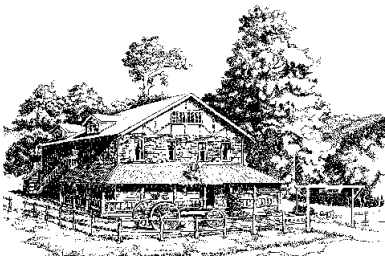


July 4th, 1959



July 4th, 2002

View From the Museum Porch



The number one thing on everyone's mind in Colorado this summer is the drought and resulting forest fires. In May the experts informed us the snow

pack was 29% of normal as the result of the driest winter and spring in modern recorded history.

There was virtually no spring runoff. Wind River was practically dry after the YMCA took its allotted water. To head off potential problems the Estes Park Center asked staff and guests to conserve water. The Y also increased its capacity to draw water from the Colorado Big Thompson Project that transports water from the western slope.

In late May Estes Park received a single wet spring snow. There was some additional rain in early June, but for the most part May, June and July were as dry as the previous winter. In late June forecasters predicted monsoon rains were on the horizon; however, it was almost two weeks before we saw a significant monsoon weather pattern.

Wildfires plaguing southern Colorado and Arizona poured smoke into the Estes Valley obscuring the mountains in mid-June. Several times the concentration was high enough to smell.

As you know by now Estes Park had a close call with its own fire beginning on July 17. On that date, not long after we returned from a hike up Flattop Mountain, we learned there was a growing fire near Big Elk Meadows east of Estes Park.

By sundown a visible plume of smoke loomed over the mountains. Ash fell from the sky like snow. As you can imagine everyone's adrenaline level went through the roof. The mood of the Estes Valley for the next several days was nervous to put it mildly. During the crisis Y management kept guests and staff informed. Some events were can-



Smoke plume from Big Elk fire looms over Teddy's Teeth.

celed in the interest of guests' safety, but for the most part life at the Y went on as usual. Our staff deserves a lot of credit in managing the situation.

On Friday evening our spirits sank as a World War II era slurry bomber crashed east of town while fighting the fire. The old war bird broke apart in mid-air killing the crew. The fire reached a crescendo Friday night and Saturday morning as both Big Elk Meadows and Little Valley subdivisions were evacuated.

Late Saturday afternoon the long awaited monsoons appeared bringing a little rain, cooler temperatures and high humidity. The Creator had given us a reprieve at our darkest hour. Several days of similar weather quickly gave firefighters the upper hand.

One week after the fire began it was declared 50% contained. Everyone was back in their homes, but we were told the fire would probably smolder until we received significant rain or winter's first snows.

It has been interesting to observe nature's response to the drought. Many late spring and early summer plants either failed to bloom or only bloomed enough to insure survival of the species. The flower buds of the tiny ball cactus withered and died without opening. Moisture loving iris only bloomed in the very wettest places. The aspen trees were very late in putting out their leaves.

On Trail Ridge the tundra flowers responded to the drought with a short lived but very intense bloom in late June and early July. One expert

described it as a "compression" response occurring when the early flowers put off blooming in hopes of more moisture and the late flowers bloomed early to take advantage of dwindling moisture.

We seem to have started with the weather report, so we might as well continue with the critters before moving on to the museum business. The annual battle of the nesting box at the museum was won by tree swallows who somehow managed to defeat the house wrens in a heated and protracted battle.

On June 27th we almost had a head on collision with the blind bear. As we were leading a group around Emerald Mountain, George Stone hollered, "bear." With eyes totally white from cataracts, Jack quickly identified it as the blind bear, "Einstein."



He has won the nickname of "Einstein" for his amazing ability to survive in spite of his disability. He walks with a sloppy gate leading with his feet to feel what is in front of him. Mostly this adaptive behavior serves Einstein well but not always as the group witnessed him walk headlong into an aspen tree.

On July 1st we had a few minutes to sit on the museum porch to catch our breath. Suddenly, a Prairie falcon flew right in front of us with a ground squirrel in its talons. It landed on top of a power pole across the street. Everything came to a stop as we grabbed binoculars to watch the beautiful predator devour its afternoon snack.

The drought conditions made the hummers much more prevalent around the museum's feeders during early summer. With the arrival of more guests and staff who hang feeders the crowd around the feeders thinned.

In July we were treated to the annual arrival of the Rufus hummingbirds who seemingly have nothing better to do than terrorize the less aggressive Broadtails. This year we received a bonus with the arrival of a pair of Calliope hummingbirds.

At our home on Thunder Mountain across

from the Y-Camp we saw one of the most interesting displays of hummingbird behavior we've ever seen. A red tail hawk landed in a tall pine tree in front of our house intent on catching a rabbit eating in the front yard. What the hawk got instead was an intense "in your face" scolding by a hummingbird who obviously thought the top of the tree was his. We almost fell over the porch railing laughing as "David" took on "Goliath." The hawk soon tired of the pesky hummer and flew off to find quieter hunting grounds.

Our summer is busy as usual as we try to fill each day with something fun and interesting. We begin in late February or early March planning our schedule. By the time we publish our spring newsletter we start feeling really confident that we have a handle on the upcoming summer. Then things slowly start to unravel.

About the middle of May Jack received a telephone call from Center Director Gary Van Horn. He wanted to let Jack know that they had decided to move the Tuesday morning donor/member coffee to the museum from the Executive Office. He and Kent Meyer really wanted one of us here every Tuesday! A quick peek at our schedule made Jack choke. At least half of our Tuesdays were already scheduled with hikes and activities. Next February Jack will check with Gary and Kent first.

Early June was crunch time on the Studebaker wagon. The beast had to be road worthy before month's end for a maiden voyage before its public debut on July 4th. Jack finished just minutes before Alan Jackson showed up with his Belgians on June 18th! A quick turn around the grounds proved the Studebaker ready. We'll tell and show you more later on.

Of course the highlight of the summer was Wind River Lodge Centennial Day. The main reason this newsletter is a little later than usual getting to you is due to that observance. Full coverage of the event follows our ramblings.

We've rambled far too long and it's time to get to the meat of the newsletter.

YMCA CELEBRATES WIND RIVER LODGE CENTENNIAL

On July 24 over seventy-five people joined us at Coleman cabin to celebrate, remember and honor the YMCA's heritage and to kick off the Y's centennial celebration. At the gathering we joined three circles into one as we commemorated the opening of the Wind River Lodge one hundred years ago.

President and CEO Kent Meyer opened the celebration by welcoming the group. He then introduced Lulie who told about Guy LaCoste.

She told the crowd that about 1900 a young journalist and entrepreneur, Guy Robert LaCoste came to Estes Park. He dreamed of building the largest tourist facility not only in Estes Park but also in all of Colorado. To begin his grand plan he incorporated with three other individuals and opened the Wind River Lodge in 1902.

LaCoste then secured a lease option on almost 10,000 additional acres controlled by the Earl of Dunraven. Unable to hold his consortium together he lost the Earl's property after a short time. His dream dashed, LaCoste sold his share of the Wind River Lodge and left Colorado.

Before closing Lulie introduced Marty and Mariah Nyvall of Mesa, Arizona. We met Marty while researching LaCoste. He and William Armstrong of St. Louis are the only descendants of LaCoste we've located thus far.

Lulie then introduced Board member and Chair of the YMCA Centennial Committee William E. Sweet III. Bill told us how his grandfather had vacationed in Estes Park beginning in 1899.



Shortly after LaCoste sold out, the founders of the YMCA of the Rockies led by William E. Sweet gathered at Grand Lake in 1907.

After adjourning, Sweet brought the founders to Estes Park. While they inspected several properties, we believe William E. Sweet had already made up his mind where the newly formed YMCA would eventually settle as he showed them the Wind River Lodge.

Bill Sweet reminded us that while the motives of Guy LaCoste and the founders were different they were all men of vision. LaCoste's dream of a grand resort in the Rockies never materialized, but the founders and their successors carried their vision through the decades to create what we know as the YMCA of the Rockies. Today, we are more than a resort as we serve families, conferences and staff in a beautiful natural setting.

Bill then introduced Jack who told those gathered about the third circle represented by museum volunteer Jackie Johnson. He related how we had met Jackie in the mid-1980s. In her we found a kindred spirit who loved history.

Through the years the three of us linked up to research Jack Moomaw, Miner Bill and later LaCoste. Jackie hated reaching a dead end and accepted defeat bitterly no matter how trivial the information might seem.

After ten years of frustrating dead ends we turned over the search for Guy LaCoste to Jackie. Along with her daughter, Kelly, the body of knowledge concerning LaCoste began to grow. Finally, Kelly located LaCoste's ashes in a holding crypt in Salt Lake City.

Not long after Jackie passed away last summer her two daughters Kelly and Kris approached Jack with an idea to bring LaCoste's ashes back to Estes Park as a memorial to their mother's work at the Dorsey Museum. Everyone agreed this would be a fitting acknowledgement of Jackie's dedication to historical research.

After Jack introduced Jackie's family Lulie unveiled a "plaque" celebrating the centennial of the Wind River Lodge in memory of Jackie. We put the " " around plaque because the foundry had failed to deliver the bronze marker on schedule in spite of a two-month order window. Instead we



printed a facsimile and mounted it to a large boulder.

Kent Meyer closed the observance by tying the three circles together. He reminded those gathered

how LaCoste's dream was not a failure and how the founders of the Y represented by William E. Sweet dreamed their own dream that became the YMCA of the Rockies. Kent acknowledged the valuable service rendered to the Y by volunteers such as Jackie to keep the dream alive. Kent then closed the gathering with a prayer.

Throughout the rest of the day we had that warm inner glow one gets after tying up loose ends. Guy LaCoste was released from the dark anonymous holding crypt and returned to Estes Park. The YMCA acknowledged the vision of its founders and kicked off its centennial. We acknowledged the work of a dedicated volunteer, Jackie Johnson.

MUSEUM RENOVATION BEGINS

After twenty-three years of use the museum's physical plant is fraying around the edges. Jack has done his best to keep up with the maintenance, but age, both his and the building's, has overtaken us.

On July 9th, Buildings and Grounds arrived in force to work on exterior repairs. They replaced the fire escape and weather rotted siding. The front steps were replaced and porch railings repaired. The entire museum was sprayed and window trim painted. All this was done without Jack smashing a finger or spilling a drop of paint.

This winter the work for us begins when the renovation work moves inside. Tens of thousands of visitors' feet have completely worn through the floor finish.

Jack thought about tackling the job himself but decided against it. After talking with the Y's flooring contractor we decided that the most efficient way to complete the job was to empty the museum.

Beginning January 1, the museum will close for at least two months. To refinish the floors requires that we pack everything up and move it into a 40 foot trailer in the parking lot. We figure that packing will take about 2-3 weeks. The actual floor refinishing takes about one week.

While the museum is empty Buildings and Grounds will patch sheetrock and repaint. An electrical contractor will add or replace lighting to better utilize our hallways for exhibits and eliminate dark corners.



Buildings & Grounds rebuilds the fire escape.

Some exhibits in place since 1979 are very tired. The period room settings including the parlor, kitchen, dining room and bedrooms will return to their present configuration. The archaeology display will remain as will the A.A. Hyde Room. The Miscellaneous Room will receive a major facelift along with the early transportation and Wind River Lodge displays.

As you can imagine we are approaching this project with much apprehension and anxiety. We're currently working on a budget for the project. We should have everything nailed down in the fall. So, sometime before the end of the year you'll be hearing from us with our hands out asking for your assistance.

KNABE PIANO TAKES A WINTER "VACATION"

For some time now Ralph Oswald, our piano tuner, has told us the square grand Knabe piano needed additional work. Last summer Ralph coaxed a last season out of the instrument with a liberal application of WD 40 to the action. This spring the action decided to give it up and so did Ralph.

According to Ralph, the bushings in the jack flanges need replacing to smooth out the action. Clueless about what Ralph was talking about, Jack could only ask the inevitable question, "How much?"

We decided that next winter would be perfect for the project since the museum will be in utter chaos anyway. The cost according to Ralph is between \$400 and \$500. Lulie and I have already kicked in the first \$25 just so we don't have to listen to the poor beast suffer and listen to pianists fuss about the sticky keys!

STUDEBAKER WAGON MAKES DEBUT

Over the last twenty-three years we've had many projects with long gestations, but the restoration of the Studebaker wagon has been one of the longest. It has also been one of the most memorable and rewarding.

As we mentioned in our earlier ramblings, Allen wanted to inspect the wagon before hitching up his big Belgians. Alan quickly spotted a crucial chassis piece installed upside down! Jack could only shrug his shoulders, saying he had no plans or photographs to work from. To flip the piece required disassembling the wagon bed and removing it. Jack decided to sleep on it.

Jack has the knack for solving problems in the twilight time between sleep and consciousness. True to form a couple of days later he formulated a plan utilizing a hydraulic jack and a series of levers to lift the bed high enough to flip the errant piece.

The trial run with the Belgians went off without a hitch. We hopped in the back and took a turn

around the circle in front of the Ad Building. The horses' hooves clop-clopped on the pavement and the wagon made authentic groaning and creaking noises. The grins on our faces stretched from ear to ear.



Yee-Ha! Longs Peak or bust.

As the 4th approached Allan informed Jack that we couldn't use his horses to pull the wagon. It was if someone had let the air out of a kid's balloon. We were devastated, but as they say, "The show must go on."

We were left with no choice but to enlist the service of our big diesel Dodge truck. From out of storage came a 45 star flag representing the number of states in the Union when the wagon was built. We enlisted our friend, National Guard Command Sergeant Major John Steele, as a color guard. We piled the museum staff into the wagon and lined up for the parade. Lulie finished off the float by attaching a sign reading, "Make Believe Horses" to the truck's door.



At the last minute Elizabeth and Carl Anderson asked for a ride. Since it was the two of them who transported the wheels to and from Yoder, Kansas for restoration, we said, "Jump in." Jack drove the truck with the CD blaring "Stars and Stripes Forever."

Along the way friends and contributors who made the restoration possible waved and smiled. It was a good day. The wagon performed flawlessly. As for the "real" horses, there is always next year...

JUST RANCH SURVEY AT SNOW MOUNTAIN RANCH COMMENCES

Shortly after Kent Meyer assumed his duties as President/CEO he informed Jack that he wanted us to assume an active role in assisting Snow Mountain Ranch with their museum activities. We welcomed the opportunity with mixed emotions knowing that it could provide many "challenges and opportunities."

In mid July we met with SMR Center Manager Julie Watkins, Program Director Mark Birdseye and Jim Daxton, a relative of the Just family. We gathered at the Just ranch to talk about the possibilities for preservation, interpretation and program uses for the site.

A quick walk through of the ranch buildings was overwhelming. The homestead has been allowed to molder and deteriorate. The original ranch house had several unsympathetic additions made over the decades. There are many rotten logs, broken windows and who knows what else.

The barns, original homestead, bunkhouse, chicken coops and other outbuildings are in various states of disrepair. Some are obviously past saving or lack historical significance.

As we sat in the sun swatting biting flies and munching on a sack lunch, we formulated a plan. First, we will make a search through all our files, copy pictures, documents, etc and share with the group to form a cohesive archive of the Just Ranch and family.

Next, Jack was assigned the task of investigating the possibility of acquiring a grant for an architectural assessment of the buildings and the



"Shorty" Just and "Bob" the dog circa 1925.

possibility of state historic status for the Just Ranch.

We agreed that we have to come up with a plan that fits the YMCA's budget and the programming needs of SMR while preserving our heritage.

Wind River Lodge Mystery Photograph

When the last edition of *Musings* went to press we were eagerly awaiting the photograph of the Wind River Lodge found on eBay to appear. Sure enough just about the time we picked it up from the printer the photograph showed up in our box.

The photograph is everything we expected and more. The detail is exquisite. In the background we are able to see Guy LaCoste's homestead that was invisible in the blurred copy we previously owned. It will make a fine addition to the centennial edition of the Y's history. We're still trying to figure out what the pile of stuff is to the right of the tree. It appears to be logs piled up for a bonfire.



LULA W. DORSEY MUSEUM ASSOCIATION

- _____ New Membership
- _____ Membership Renewal
- _____ Address/Spelling Correction

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Zip

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