

# SAN JUAN COURIER

Summer 2012

Silverton, San Juan County, Colorado

## Jail Museum Enters Final Phases of Restoration

by David Singer

Imagine riding the train into Silverton in 1903, following one of the roughest trails on which a narrow gauge track had ever been built. A burly miner, arriving from the metropolis of Denver to the remote high country of the San Juan would be a few blocks away from "Notorious" Blair Street, ready to join in the revelry. To the north you see an imposing three story brick and stone structure, one of the largest buildings in the heart of the Rockies, and you realize you better walk the line; it's the new state-of-the-art prison known as the San Juan County Jail. This was the scene for thousands of fortune seekers who came to Silverton. Today, this is the home of the San Juan County Historical Society!

This building was the third jail erected by the county. Earlier attempts had resulted in less than secure structures. Therefore, it was constructed as a state of the art statement of the presence of law and order. Assembled of finely crafted brick and cut sandstone masonry, this three-story frontier jailhouse boasted a high style Italianate design that one would have expected to find in a larger city like Denver. Today, almost all of the building's historic fabric remains intact including decorative belt courses and entablature, segmental arched window headers, an impressive ashlar foundation and porches with decorative balustrades, spindle work and gabled stoops. The original construction drawings for the building are held in the collections of the San Juan County Clerk's vault. The original tool-proof cells and related hardware were custom made in St. Louis, Missouri and remain intact. The first occupant was Andy Johnson, a 38-year old male, found guilty of burglary. The jailor's wife prepared his meals for five months and 26 days in her kitchen in the residential quarters on the first floor.

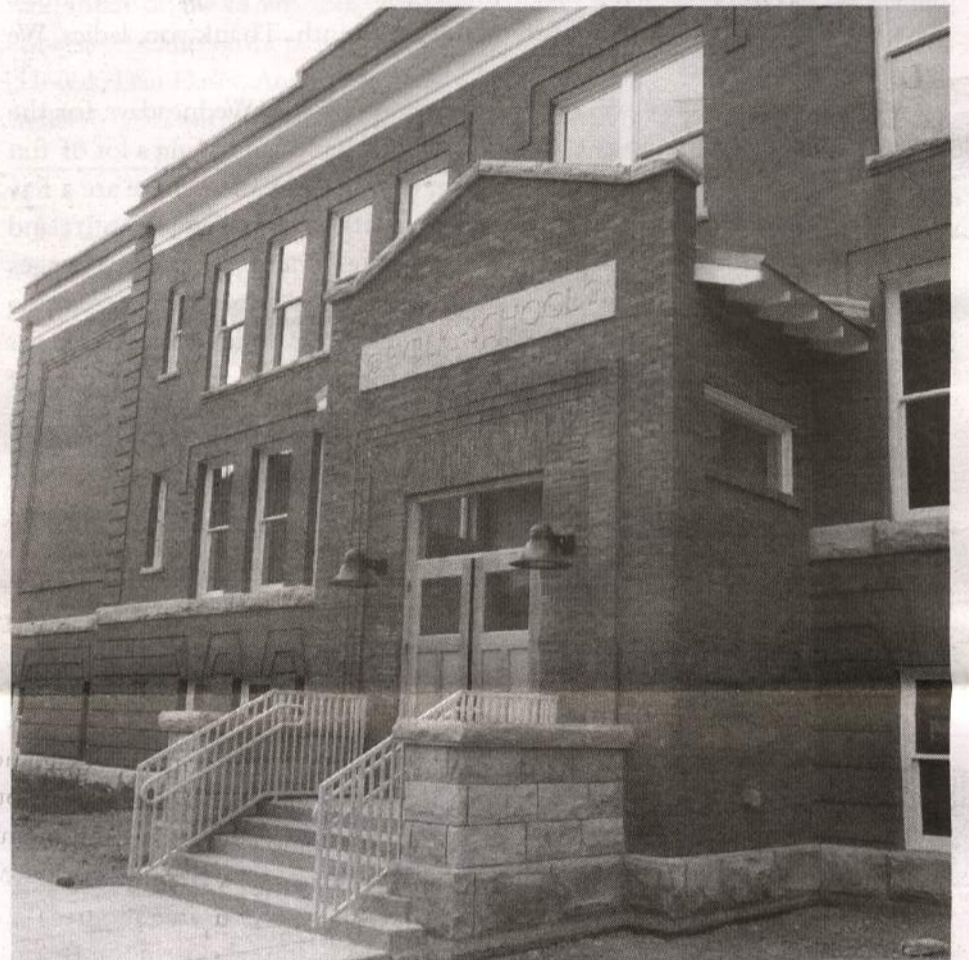
Before the society began using the building in 1965, the jail served the

people of San Juan County in several capacities. In the 1930s it served as a home to retired miners who were wards of the County. By the end of World War II, the building sat empty. In 1965, The Society entered into a 99-year lease with the county and the jail has served as our home and museum ever since. On a shoestring budget we've maintained the building as best we could over the past 46 years as a repository for some of the vast collection of San Juan County artifacts, mining tools, equipment and mineral specimens held by the Society.

Over the past three years, I have been honored to manage the restoration of the jail, ushering the building through a magnificent transformation. My company, Silverton Restoration Consulting, wrote several grants to get the project off the ground and completed a Historic Structures Assessment of the building with funding from the State Historical Fund. We have completed the first two phases of construction in partnership with the fund, San Juan County, and the Department of Local Affairs. John Richardson, the project foreman, working with a crew of local craftsmen including: Darren Richardson, John Girodo, Scott Craig, Nick Houston, Cody Bradford, Dee Jaramillo and Kenneth Wilson, have carefully restored the exterior masonry walls and foundation, all the windows and exterior doors, reconstructed the missing north porch and chimney mass and replaced the standing-seam roof. The building's foundation has been waterproofed and tuck-pointed and a new dehumidification system has been added in the basement to insure the long-term preservation of displays and artifacts.

We are now nearing completion for the final phase of the project, focusing on the interior. Preservation work in this last phase of the project included repairs and refinishing of all interior wood trim and flooring,

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Another major historic preservation project has taken place over the past two years in Silverton at the historic 1912 Silverton School and WPA built gymnasium. As a part of the project, the historic original west entrance has been rebuilt replacing a 1970s shop addition.

## Silverton School Celebrates Restoration

by Dan Salazar

In early August, Silverton Public School will hold its Grand Reopening and a Rededication Ceremony, with all alumni invited, was held during Memorial Day weekend.

In November 2008, the coal boiler that heated the school building and gymnasium ruptured beyond repair. As options were examined, inspections on existing buildings revealed major deficiencies in fire and health safety and handicapped accessibility. Major improvements would have to include making sure that all these issues be addressed. Just replacing the boiler was not an option this time and the town was facing a complete overhaul of the buildings or starting over with a new facility.

With the cold days of winter coming, no heat source, and armed with a front page Denver Post story, the School set about trying to gather the funding necessary. Luckily the State of Colorado had recently put together its BEST Program, administered by the Department of

Education. The BEST (Building Excellent Schools Today) program provides an annual amount of funding in the form of competitive grants. They came to the table with \$9.2 million. Colorado's State Historic Fund saw the need to maintain this historic structure in the heart of a National Historic Landmark and pitched in, along with the Governor's Energy Office and the Colorado Department of Local Affairs. But it still took a vote of the citizens of San Juan County to get the project rolling. And after going a complete year with no central heat, a bond issue was passed in November 2009 that allowed the School to begin its \$11 million restoration.

While the Historical Society was not directly involved in the project, its leadership in historical preservation over the past several decades certainly provided an example and inspiration for this great Silverton project.

Alumni returning for the celebration are encouraged to visit the museum while in town.

