

# SAN JUAN COURIER

Summer 2016

Silverton, San Juan County, Colorado



*Beneath the snow covered peaks of Galena Mountain and Little Giant Peak, Loren Lew (left) and Mike Geryak align rail on the first segment of the planned Silverton Northern rail project in a work outing last fall. A full 220 feet of rail was laid on the way to the first goal of Arastra Gulch. It is perhaps the most ambitious project ever undertaken by the Society which is known for biting off big chunks and actually getting them chewed!*

## Society plans an informative lecture series this summer

The San Juan County Historical Society plans the following events this summer:

Friday, June 10, 5:30-8:30 p.m.

— Night at the Museum.

Friday, July 22, 7-9 p.m.

— Dr. Don Paulson

“Mining in the Victorian Era”  
from Miner to Smelter;

Town Hall

Friday, August 12, 7-9 p.m.

- Lecture/Speaker Bev Rich on
- Mining; Town Hall

Friday, September 2, 7-9 p.m.

— Andy Gulliford, Professor of  
Southwest Studies and History at  
Fort Lewis College; Town Hall

For the latest information, please check  
our web site: <http://www.sanjuancountyhistoricalsociety.org/>

and/or our Facebook page.

## Brief Overview of the San Juan County Historical Society

The San Juan County Historical Society (SJCHS) was established in 1964 as a Non-profit 501(c)(3) Colorado Corporation for preserving the history of San Juan County, Colorado.

The Town of Silverton, the Durango and Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad and the Mayflower Mill have each been designated a National Historical Landmark. The Old Hundred Boarding House, owned by SJCHS, is on the Colorado list of Historic Places. Properties owned by the San Juan Historical Society include the Mayflower Mill, the Little Nation Mill (located at Howardsville), the Silverton Standard and the Miner newspaper, the Engine House (housing the famous 315 narrow gauge steam locomotive), and the Silverton Power Station.

The Historical Society operates the Mining Heritage Center, the 1902 County Jail Museum in Silverton, the Mayflower Mill Tour, the Allen Nossaman Memorial Archive, the Silverton Power Station and the Silverton Standard and the Miner Newspaper (designated a National Historic Site in Journalism).

Work has begun on the Silverton Railroad Historical Park located between the Silverton Northern Engine House and the Silverton Depot. Another railroad effort is focused on the reconstruction of the Silverton Northern Railroad. Railroad line ran to Animas Forks.

Please consider joining us in our efforts.

## First rail laid on the way to Howardsville!

By Fritz Klink

The San Juan County Historical Society's Silverton Northern Railroad restoration project moved forward in 2015 with the construction of new road bed and the laying of track. The group had assembled rail and ties the previous summer. After we had a local contractor build up the initial section of road bed, volunteer crews worked Saturdays and after work during the later part of the summer to place the ties and then actually lay rail and spike it down, often in snow storms.

With the material at hand, we were able to get the first 220 feet of track in place. Loren Lew and Mike Geryak, assisted by several other volunteers, were the prime movers on this project. By late October, rail was in place and the first week in November we had a "First Spike" ceremony that was well attended.

Plans for 2016 center around moving more rail and ties to our starting point just east of the powerhouse. Our initial rail has been donated by the Ridgway Railroad Museum, and they have committed for up to a mile of rail for the Silverton Northern. That will

involve about 18 road trips with donated trucks and trailers and volunteer labor to move that much rail. Our group has been reimbursing the operating expenses for this out of our donated funds.

We have also been working with the Galloping Goose Society in Dolores to obtain more rail. Their planned project has been cancelled and they have a substantial amount of rail they can't use. Both the Ridgway group and the Dolores folks have been very supportive of the Silverton Northern work.

The initial goal of laying track is to reach Arastra Gulch. We can then start running short excursions to show people what we are doing and to serve as a fund raiser. There are some heavy dirt moving expenses looming up ahead of us just to reach that one mile goal.

One project we are presently working on is the acquisition of a hand operated rail car, once used by section men to get to work sites before motorized equipment came on the scene. We can operate this on even short pieces of completed track. It will serve as a fund raiser and should ap-

peal to families as a fun thing to do. We are seeking donations to buy this piece of equipment, or take in investment partners who will be repaid out of donations until we pay off the cost of the vehicle.

We have an enthusiastic group of volunteers who been putting in a lot of effort to get as far as we have. The Silverton Northern is still accepting donations at all levels and more information can be found on our website at [www.silvertonnorthern.com](http://www.silvertonnorthern.com).

### Visit the Museums

**The Mining Heritage Center & Jail are located on Greene Street just behind the County Courthouse, and are open daily until mid-October, from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.**

**Admission is \$8.00 for adults and \$3.00 for children 5 to 12.**

**The Mayflower Mill Tour, located just northeast of town is open through Labor Day with an \$8.00 adult admission and children under 12 are free. The hours are 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.**

# Chairman's Report

Dear Members,

As I write today, we are enjoying a lovely, breezy spring day. We had a lot of snow early, then a very early, wet spring—that is fine, we need the moisture. I just got back from the museum where our 4th and 5th grade students (all ten of them) are having a dress rehearsal for the play they are presenting today at five o'clock. This year the middle school worked with me at the museum and the cemetery and with Casey Carroll and Ray Dileo at the archive to find out about under-represented cultures in Silverton's past. They were very surprised to find out that Silverton had a black community which even had their own church—an African Methodist Episcopalian one. The kids were also surprised to find out that we had Chinese citizens, which, in one of our less proud moments, we chased out of town in 1904. But, history is history, both the bad and the good, and we need to learn from it so that we don't repeat the bad.

We have been cleaning the museum all week in anticipation of opening this coming Saturday. Boy, our museum has grown into an empire—do you know how many windows I have washed this week? We are losing Ivy Lefebvre who got a year-round job at the school, complete with benefits. Good for you, Ivy, we truly appreciate your years of good work. Casey, Judy Zimmerman and I will be manning the desk this summer and welcome Steve Allen into the fold. Downtown is starting to bustle with the newly restored Grand Imperial Hotel at front and center—it looks like another good year in our little town. Congratulations to the Harper family for making the old girl GRAND again.

The guys have been working on exhibits all winter and elsewhere in these pages you will find out the new and best of what they have been doing. Many mornings this winter, Scott Fetchenhier worked from 7:00 to 9:00 a.m. because of his other duties as County Commissioner. How is that for dedication—going to work in the dark!

The Mill will open June 11 and again Melanie Bergolc and Will Meyerriecks are our docents. You can't get any better than those two—Melanie has a degree in geology and Will wrote the book—*Drills and Mills-Precious Metal Mining and Milling Methods of the 19th Century Frontier West*. David Singer is finishing up on construction documents for what is left to do at the Mill—the coal trestle, the water tank, the inside of the office building and some repairs to the mill itself so that if one of us wins the lottery for matching funds, we can proceed with applying for grant money to finish up. If any of you are around on June 9th, it will be clean-up day at the Mill—9:00 a.m. sharp.

We are also administering several other grant projects—a Historic Structure Assessment for Silverton's old town hall, which is on Blair Street; work on the facades of the Cole and Hoffman building, done by Klinke and Lew—the masters; and work on the foundation of the Old Hundred Boardinghouse, also to be done by Loren Lew. Thanks to our partners at the Colorado Division of Reclamation, Mining and Safety for again helping us with helicopter time.

We have a busy summer coming up—Cemetery Workday will be June 18th from 10:00 to noon; the Annual Blair Street Historic District Association Antique Truck and Car Show on June 25th; the Silverton Standard's Fifth Annual Silverton Western Movie Festival, Silverton School Performing Arts Center, featuring old Westerns filmed in and around Silverton will be on Sept. 2nd and 3rd; and Step Back in Time on September 9th through 11th. We are proud to help sponsor so many events that bring people to Silverton! Also in these pages you will find a schedule of our summer lecture series, which we have resurrected the past couple of years, thanks to Casey and Judy.

The Silverton Standard keeps getting awards and acclaims—we were featured on Denver's Channel 9 in mid-May. Do you think it might be because we have such a good editor, publisher and bottle washer in-chief? He is truly amazing; a one-man

show. We are lucky to have Mark Esper. His reporting on the Gold King Mine Spill was extraordinary and should win awards.

And speaking of the Gold King Mine Spill—there have been many historical milestones in San Juan County's history, but probably three of the biggest were the first strike of gold, the second, the closing of the great Sunnyside Mine in 1991 (for the first time in our history, we were not a mining town), and now, the designation of several areas of San Juan County as Superfund sites. Like it or not, it is now our new reality. We have met with the EPA's Project Head and its public relations official, as well as three people from the Colorado Department of Health. We showed them the archive and took them on a tour of our museum. We showed them that we are very serious about our mining history here, and that while ready to help them in any way we can, we are watching them. It isn't just our heritage that we are talking about, it is also our economy. Our spectacular scenery, our beautiful landmark of a town and our mining history are what people want to see. We must protect them, and that is what we intend to do.

It is with sorrow that I report to you the death of Wolfie, Silverton's adopted wild wolf-dog. He died peacefully yesterday. I was lucky enough to live in Wolfie's neighborhood, and more often than not, he found a shady place in my yard to sit. He would not let anyone touch him and lived on hand-outs from neighborhood—but, honestly, he ate better than me! Great thanks are owed to Melody Skinner, Dean Bosworth, and Paula Trautner for their care and love of the old boy. Another piece of history is gone in our quirky little town.

I can tell you, dear members, that it is hard work running this organization—all of your board members have worked hard to produce one of the best Historical Societies in the world. But, today, we helped a family from Wales put a marker on their great great grandfather's grave and the satisfaction and joy that gives us is worth all of the hard work we do. Thank you for your support, dear members—we could not do it without you!

Bev

## Silverton Northern oil shed rebuild goes ahead without grant funds

By Jerry Hoffer

Twice the San Juan County Historical Society and the Durango Railroad Historical Society have jointly applied for a grant from the Colorado State Historical Fund for reconstructing the 14 x 30 foot oil shed that sat to the east of the front of the Silverton Northern engine house in Silverton. With many more applications than funds available, our applications did not receive high enough grades from the reviewers to make the cut.

Our intent is to use the oil shed as a library, conference room, office, and break room for the members and visitors working on or visiting our railroad restoration projects in Silverton. The need for this space is so important to future projects that the two societies decided that we would proceed without a grant. To make the cost affordable, several items required for the grant application were eliminated. We will not use the services of an archeologist, salvage any of the original corrugated siding or roofing, salvage any original wood for reuse on the shed, nor produce an interpretive sign. Also, we will not use a construction contractor. Volunteers will construct the shed. With these changes, the budget for reconstructing the oil shed was reduced from \$31,655 as requested in the grant application to \$13,629.

In August 2015, the old shed was quickly brought down by wrapping a cable around it and tugging with a jeep. Cleaning up of the debris took the better part of a week. We discovered the rusted corrugated metal was badly deteriorated and would not have been salvageable. However we were able to salvage three 4x4 posts and a couple of boards, which went to the barnwood pile at the museum instead of (Continued on next page)

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# San Juan Courier

*Published annually by the San Juan County Historical Society, a non-profit Colorado corporation, for its members and all persons interested in the preservation of the history of San Juan County, Colorado.*

## San Juan County Historical Society

### Officers and Directors, 2016

Beverly Rich, Chairman; Scott Fetchenhier, Secretary/Treasurer;  
Jerry Hoffer; Darnell Zanoni; Patty Dailey; Stephen Rich; and Kim Davy Eisner,  
Directors.

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## Join the San Juan County Historical Society Today!

**Box 154, Silverton, CO 81433**

**(970) 387-5609**

I wish to enroll as a member of the San Juan County Historical Society in the class designated below (please circle desired membership) for the calendar year 2016.

I understand that this membership entitles me (and my spouse, if applicable) to a vote at the annual meeting in October, 2016.

1. **Member** — \$25 per year, entitling an individual to one vote in meetings of the general membership, discounts on books, and free museum admission.
2. **Family Membership** — \$50 per year entitling each couple to one vote each in meetings of the general membership, discounts on books, and free museum admission.
3. **Society Patron** — \$100 per year, entitling an individual or couple to voting privileges, a museum pass for the season, and discounts on books.
4. **Life Member** — \$1000, entitling an individual or couple to all of the above privileges for life.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_



*A portion of the historic stamp mechanism at the Sound Democrat mill, pictured in 2009.*



*Visitors taking the time to visit the Sound Democrat (lower right in picture) in Placer Gulch will be treated to vistas unseen if they stay on the lower 4 x 4 road to Animas Forks*

## Sound Democrat Mill is one of the many historic mining sites that can be visited on the Alpine Loop Scenic Byway

By David Singer

This summer, the 1906 Sound Democrat Mill, located near the head of Placer Gulch, will join a growing list of historic hardrock mine and mill structures that have been the subject of a steady onslaught of historic preservation work along the Alpine Loop Scenic Byway. Over the past five years of grant writing, building assessments, preservation planning and consulting, and the development of reams of drawings sets and specifications, we've managed to complete quite a scope of work on the Alpine Loop. San Juan County is unmatched in terms of the concentration of Colorado's mining heritage, and the list of buildings and structures saved, stabilized, and rehabilitated is impressive.

The Sound Democrat will top the list of work successfully completed that visitors to the Alpine Loop can put on their itinerary, including the restoration and partial reconstruction of the Golconda Boarding House and Blacksmith Shop in Hurricane Basin, the preservation of nine buildings at Animas Forks including the restoration of the Duncan House and reconstruction of the Jail building's long lost gable roof, the stabilization and rehabilitation of the Placer Gulch boarding house, the restoration of the Tabasco Cabin at the base of Cinnamon Pass, and the on-going restoration activities at the Mayflower Mill here in Silverton.

The Sound Democrat stands today with much of its original machinery intact, ninety-five years after it ceased production in 1910. The US Bureau of Mines listed 36 stamp mills in the San Juan Region in a 1911 survey, and of all these structures, only the Sound Democrat remains. Stamp mills at the turn of the 20th century employed amalgamation and concentration technology, processing primarily low-grade ores in the San Juans. The Sound Democrat mill represents perhaps the best and only example of a small prospect mill of its type in Colorado.

Preserving and interpreting the broad landscape of our mining heritage is paramount to the tourism industry here in the remote corners of Southwestern Colorado. Given the potential threat to some of our mining heritage sites through the recently proposed Superfund listing, it's crucial we come together as a community to document and protect sites like the Sound Democrat. Preserving places like these for people to come and explore is inextricably linked to our community's economic survival. So, this year, stay a few extra nights in Silverton, and make the journey past Animas Forks and explore the Sound Democrat!

*David Singer is the Principle Investigator for Silverton Restoration Consulting. His company researches and develops construction documents for these types of projects, and manages their restoration. Recent projects include the Ghost Town of Animas Forks, the Mayflower Mill, and Silverton's Miner's*

### Oil Shed

(Continued from prior page)

the burn pile. The wooden floor of the shed was built on stringers setting directly on the ground, so much of it was rotted away. We used a cable to flip over a portion of the floor to make it easy to dismantle. This was tried again on the rest of the floor but the cable cut the rotten planks in two. Only a couple of planks were taken to the museum and the rest went to the burn pile. Again the remaining site cleanup took several days.

In late August, the project finances received a great boost when a new Durango Railroad Historical Society member donated \$5,000 specifically for rebuilding the shed.

As part of this project, a forty-foot 18 inch diameter sleeve was placed 8 feet deep for a future 6 inch city waterline. This is required because the water line will pass under the northeast corner of the shed in

the sleeve. This portion of the project was contracted to a local excavator to bury the sleeve, mark the ends of the sleeve with 1 1/2-in vertical PVC pipes, fill and compact the soil, restore the ditch behind the shed, and level the site. In September, this task was completed under budget. In spring, the site will have been further compacted by the spring melt. By mid June 2016 it will be leveled again to the depth required by the foundation, then construction should begin.

Once the shed reconstruction is finished later in the summer, we will provide furnishings and office supplies that were donated by United Blood Services when its Durango office was disbanded.

In 2009 the two societies won a grant from the State Historical Fund to begin restoring the two-stall Silverton Northern engine house and to reconstruct some Silverton Northern track. The main purpose was for storage of the Denver & Rio Grande Western Locomotive 315, restored to operation by the Durango group during 2001-07, and to provide a

place to restore and maintain railroad equipment by both organizations. Work under this grant, completed in 2011, saw the two service pits inside the engine house restored, along with the big doors and foundation, and track along three blocks of Cement Street with a spur into the engine house and a connection to the Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge track.

During 2011-13 the San Juan County Historical Society performed a detailed historic structures assessment, supported by a state grant, to complete the restoration of the engine house. This spring both societies began to develop a detailed proposal to the state fund for the restoration, which should be submitted in the fall. The objective is to restore the engine house and upgrade it for use as a living museum where we will restore, maintain, and store the 315 and some railcars and display historical railroad artifacts. We will insulate the building, add a furnace and bathroom with a shower, then develop metal and wood shops in the rear areas.



**Reconstructed steam engine obtained from Colorado Springs. It is one of the many new items and exhibits this year in the always improving museum. Be sure to visit!**

## “Exhibits Production Crew” has busy winter — as usual

By Stephen Rich

This past winter your “Exhibits Production Crew” has completed several new projects, which will enhance our visitors’ enjoyment and understanding of San Juan County’s mining history. The crew decided this winter season we would fine tune our exhibits by cleaning and rearranging the cases, upgrading our interpretive labels and adding or changing lighting.

My first project was the construction of an eight foot long exhibit case for the mineral room, which will house a new collection of local minerals. Scott Fetchenhier worked with the donor on the display of the minerals. The collection was donated by the family of Amos Jarmillo of Silverton.

We then extended the walls in the blacksmith shop and the machine doctor exhibit using weathered lumber to make the spaces more like a room. Zeke Zanoni added more artifacts and reorganized the tools in the exhibits making them less cluttered and more user friendly, as a blacksmith shop would have been. Zeke also made several needed improvements to the lighting in several of the mining exhibit areas. We are gradually changing to LED lights replacing old fluorescent fixtures as they give out.

The next project was the Beaver Collection. I constructed a base with wheels to raise the case to a more comfortable viewing height. Repairs were made and the case was stained. A more neutral burlap was installed onto the shelves replacing the old colored fabric.

My next project was to design and construct two weathered wood, LED lighted, mineral cases for the tunnel into the pneumatic rock drill exhibit. Scott and I installed the cases and then he loaded them with

numerous minerals from the McNaughton/Dyson collection.

If you remember, a couple of years ago we acquired several vintage steam engines from the Western Museum of Mining and Industry in Colorado Springs. While moving the largest engine into the museum our forklift encountered a soft spot in the gravel and shifted slightly to one side. The shift caused the steam engine to slide and the engine’s exposed flywheel hit one of the forks. The impact broke all six spokes of the wheel. We were devastated! The machine sat in our shop while we explored various options to fix or replace the flywheel...to no end. John Richardson, a very talented guy who has performed many tasks for the Society, including designing and constructing the fire escape for the jail restoration, indicated that he could repair the wheel.

This was a tricky project, as the spokes are cast iron making welding very difficult. We told him to proceed! He set up a jig and a welding station in the new basement and began fitting the spokes to the axel and the flywheel. While this was going on I began cleaning the steam engine, removing old hardened grease and loose paint. Once that was done I polished the brass and steel components. I then repainted the entire engine the typical green with tractor red accents.

John did a remarkable job welding the flywheel. When it was assembled and painted it became nearly impossible to see any repairs to the flywheel. We then moved the steam engine into the exhibit hall to become the focal point of a new exhibit: *The Power of Steam*. Interpretive labels and several historic photographs were installed to complete the new exhibit.

## Archive is “year-round” busy!

By Casey Carroll & Ray Dileo

It was another busy year for the Archive! We started off the year by creating a digital frame slideshow for the Museum for display this summer.

We produced an incredible amount of images for our Archive patrons this year, but we are especially proud of the images that we produced for the Grand Imperial Hotel. It was our largest accomplishment of the year. The Grand Imperial Hotel ordered more than 120 images of Silverton at the turn of the century. Ray and I scanned each historic image, optimized each and sent them out to be professionally printed. The Hotel had these images matted and framed and they are now hanging throughout the building. The hotel also ordered images of Otto Mears for their new Otto Mears Room. If you have an opportunity, drop by the newly renovated (and quite beautifully, we might add!) hotel and view these pictures of Silverton’s past. They are amazing!

Matte Trappe Photo & Film created a video

about Hardrock 100 for which we supplied a dozen or so historic images of Silverton. The video will be showing at Town Hall June 22nd at 6:30 p.m.

At the end of May, we were visited by the Burgess family of Wales, U.K. Gwen Burgess and her three children; Daniel, Ruthie, and Rachel stayed in Silverton three nights exploring our historic little town. Gwen’s Great-Great-Grandfather, John D. Jones, aka “Bunker Hill”, had come to Silverton to mine from Wales in the late 1800s. Freda Peterson’s Hillside Cemetery books state that, “John D. Jones, age 49, died suddenly while sitting in a chair while employed in the Red Mountain Mining District. His body was taken to Silverton’s Congregational Church and he was buried at Hillside Cemetery”. The Burgess’ came to Silverton and brought a slate plaque for John D. Jones’ unmarked grave. Ray, Bev Rich, and I were their tour guides. We accompanied them to the Hillside Cemetery and there they found a nice spot to place the grave marker. Daniel and Gwen Burgess gave a presentation

at Town Hall about mining in Wales through the centuries. It was a great presentation. The Burgess family presented Silverton with an official Wales flag. Penny Moore opened the Congregational Church for them, another highlight of their stay in Silverton. The Burgess family was deeply moved by their visit here.

After the Gold King Mine spill, we were inundated with visitors looking for information on the mines around Silverton. We had the USGS, EPA, BLM, LA Times, Durango Herald, and even a few college students from as far away as Australia, seeking information.

The Archive was given several donations this year. They included Barbara Rasmussen’s Uncle Edward Smeade’s photo album, which ended up being far too fragile to take apart and scan, so in this instance we took digital pictures of the pictures in his album. OriLee Witte of Fruita, donated items that her father, Orion Lionel Fletcher Cowan, who worked at the Ames Hydroelectric Generating Plant, near Ophir, Colorado, had bequeathed her.

Ray visited former Silverton resident, Chris Lovato at her home in Grand Junction and scanned images from the time that Chris lived in Silverton. Patricia Schmelzer Schuster donated many wonderful items that had belonged to her grandfather, Martin Schmelzer. He worked as an electrician and millwright for the Silver Lake Mill. He staked claims in Upper Ice Lake Basin, including the Diamond Claim and two tungsten mines on Boulder Mountain.

The donations we received this year include photo albums, posters, books, clothing, letters and journals, and more. Thank you all, for helping to preserve our history.

We are currently working on a donation for the Miner’s Union Hospital. We have found a few pictures of doctors, nurses and Red Cross volunteers from the early 1900s and after they are printed, Steve Rich will be mounting these pictures for the hospital to display.

The Archive also supplied approximately 75 historic images for a PBS series about early power in and around the Silverton area.

We would like everyone to know that the Archive has a public computer with approximately 5,000 cataloged images to peruse. There are fees for research, services, scanning, and prints (members receive a discount). Come by the Archive if you would like to sit down in a warm and friendly atmosphere and view Silverton’s past. We might have the perfect historic images for your walls. We do encourage you to call first to set up a date and time: (970) 387-5609.

We would like to give a GIANT thanks to Steve Allen, who painted the exterior of the Archive last summer. It looks great! Thank you, Steve!

And many, many thanks to our great Volunteers, Judy Zimmerman, Darlene Bolfig, Harry McGavran, Lois MacKenzie and Board Member, Kim Davy Eisner. What would we do without you!

The Archive is ALWAYS in search of new images, image collections, negatives, artifacts or anything to do with Silverton’s past, from any decade. Most of our images are pre-1930s. We need images of more recent years to add to the collections. So, if you have a single image or a collection that you would like to donate or share with us, we would be thrilled! If you would like to donate to the Historical Society, be assured that your treasured images and artifacts will be in a warm, safe and happy environment in our temperature & humidity controlled 32’x32’ vault or if you prefer, we can scan your images for our files and return the originals to you.

Ray and I invite you to visit us at the Archive any Thursday and let us show you a bit of what we have and what we do!

Have a question for Ray or Casey? Contact us E-mail: archives@sanjuancountyhistoricalsociety.org or call us at (970) 387-5609.