

# San Juan Courier

Summer 2024

Silverton, San Juan County, Colorado

## Silverton Railroad Yard

### *Ribbon Cutting Held for RR Outdoor Museum; Here's How it Evolved*

By George Niederauer

On Saturday, September 30, 2023, we held an open house at the new Railroad Outdoor Museum. The Museum is a joint project of the San Juan County Historical Society and the Durango Railroad Historical Society.

#### **The Railroad Outdoor Museum**

The Museum includes the Silverton Northern Engine House, the Oil Shed next to it, and the railbus Casey Jones, all owned by the San Juan County society. The Museum also includes the Car Shed with room for twelve railcars with a sidewalk around the cars and a raised platform with interpretive signs between the two rows of cars, all owned by the Durango group. About 1800 feet of former Silverton Northern track is jointly owned by both Societies.

#### **Funding & Support**

By the time we finish restoring and furnishing the Silverton Northern Engine House with wood and metal shops and restoring four more railcars, the two Societies will have spent over \$3,000,000 on the Railroad Outdoor Museum. That includes restoring locomotive D&RGW 315, whose permanent home is in the engine house, but is currently on the Cumbres & Toltec & Toltec Scenic Railroad, based in Chama, New Mexico until this final phase of restoring the engine house is completed. It is anticipated that the engine will return to its Silverton home in the fall of 2025.

A significant amount of funding has come in the form of grants from the State Historical Fund of History Colorado. They supported restoring the Silverton Northern Engine House and reconstructing Silverton Northern track along three blocks of Cement Street and into the engine house, restoring locomotive D&RGW 315 and nine railcars.

The Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad supported us by allowing us to connect our track to theirs and by giving us an easement for the land on which the car shed stands.

The Galloping Goose Historical Society of Dolores, Colorado supported us by making a permanent loan of most of the rails and ties for the track.

The Town of Silverton supported us by allowing us to lay track along the old Silverton Northern roadbed that is now part of the Cement Street right-of-way, among other things.

#### **The Beginnings**

In 2007 the Durango organization finished a seven-year project

restoring Locomotive 315. In looking for a permanent home for the 315 and a site to display a set of railcars 14 locations were investigated along the Durango & Silverton track starting at the south end of their rail yard and going all the way up Animas Valley, but none of those sites worked out. Then it was learned that the San Juan County Historical Society had a two-stall engine house and Chairperson Bev Rich was approached in 2008. At that time the engine house was simply a storage building full of mining artifacts and other material. The two Societies reached a handshake agreement on a joint project in restoring it, with the Durango Railroad Historical Society using one stall for the 315 and Silverton using the other one for Casey Jones and other purposes.

Led by the Durango organization, the first phase, begun in 2009, reconstructed three blocks of trackage with a spur into the engine house and restored the engine and car pits and the large front doors. The San Juan County Historical Society has led the following phases to complete the engine house restoration, expected to be finished this year. The track would be used to display six railcars and room to test the 315. The Colorado State Historic Fund supported all this work.

#### **The Vision**

After several discussions about a 'Railroad Historical Park' the two groups formally approved a vision for the park in 2012. When the Durango groups plans to restore six railcars increased to twelve, it approached the Durango & Silverton about getting an easement for a pair of tracks and a car shed near their depot on 10th Street; the easement was signed in 2014. The Durango Railroad Historical Society had begun restoring railcars in 2009, with State Historic Fund support, and built the new display tracks and car shed during 2018–23. With the sidewalk and platform railings installed and the engine house interior nearly finished it was time for a ceremony to officially open the Railroad Outdoor Museum to the public.

#### **The Open House**

We made signs to direct people to the Railroad Outdoor Museum. The signs were placed temporarily for the open house event, at Greene and Cement Streets at 10th, pointing to the car shed and to the engine house. They will be permanently framed and installed this spring once we get the necessary approvals from the Town of Silverton.



*Backed by picturesque Kendall Mountain, this view from the west shows the size of the exhibit space for restored cars and visitors' ability to get up close views.*

What an exciting and satisfying day it was, after fifteen years of work on the Museum by the San Juan County Historical Society and the Durango Railroad Historical Society.

We held a ribbon cutting ceremony at the Car Shed, with George Niederauer, its project leader, as the master of ceremonies. Jim Harper, who manages the Grand Imperial Hotel in Silverton, represented the Durango & Silverton Railroad (his father, Al Harper, owner and CEO of the railroad was out of town).

DeAnne Gallegos, Executive Director of the Silverton Chamber of Commerce, also gave a few remarks. Anne McCleave, Historic Preservation Manager at the Colorado State Historic Fund, had the honor of cutting the ribbon to open the Railroad Outdoor Museum to the public.

Jerry Hoffer, project leader for the engine house and oil shed, and Bev Rich were guides at the engine house, while George Niederauer, Dave Taylor and Duane Danielson were guides at the car shed.

#### **Message from the Chairman:**

## Celebrating Sixty Years

Dear Members:

As I write today, the sun is shining and the snow is melting by the foot. We do not have spring here—we have mud season and we are up to our ankles in this rare commodity (we don't have a lot of dirt—mostly rocks, so real mud is interesting to see). We are thinking about our new season at the Mill and Museum—starting to order books for the bookstore and get the places cleaned up. Museums do not just happen, they take a lot of work and support from people like you, dear members. Thank you. And thanks we need to give this year are to Ken Vaughn who gave us that new old truck that we have been asking for so many years. We used to have to use pliers to start our old old truck, so our new truck is like driving a doggone sports car! Thanks, Ken! We also want to thank the Old 100 Mine Tour for advertising for us and telling all of their customers that they must see the mill and museum. This year thanks go to Cody Bradford Construction for being there on the spot whenever something needed to be plowed or worked on. And thanks must go to Loren Lew, who quietly uses his incredible ability to just to do about anything for us and has for years and years.

This year is our 60th Anniver-

sary—how 'bout that! The society was formed in 1964 by Allen Nossaman, Helen Salfisberg and Sandy Thompson, among others. My mother worked with Helen, a lady who knew how to put her arm around your neck and invite you to help. Mom did and took me along when I was twelve to help clean the jail, and I cannot tell you, dear members, how many dead flies I have swept up—not to mention the packrat poop after we saved the Mill. Ahhhh, you are welcome.

So to celebrate, I thought I would share with you some of the best and worst things that I have been a part of for all of the years I have been lucky enough to have been involved. I started working at the museum when I was seventeen, learning at the side of Nellie Hill, who was born in Silverton and graduated from high school in 1916. As I worked there, the Board of Directors saw that I could be a big help to them, so I was elected to the Board in 1978. Two weeks later, the jail roof collapsed. What a way to start! We moved all of our artifacts out at 30 below zero just before Christmas and worked with the County, who owns the building, to get the roof back on. Several years later we restored that building inside

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# Chairman's Comments

(Continued from Page 1)

and out, preserving a real Silverton artifact.

And we did not just preserve the jail, we saved the Mayflower Mill, a National Historic Landmark, one of only 23 in the State of Colorado. When the Sunnyside Mine shut down, its bond required them to reclaim the site. However, knowing it was an important part of our mining heritage, board member Zeke Zanoni went to Sunnyside and asked them to donate us the Mill, which is an interesting story in itself. We had to do a lot of research to see if a tiny non-profit could take on such a huge industrial site. We could and in 1996 we held a big celebration with a big barbeque and 18 kegs of beer! And in the meantime, we had volunteers Dan and Dave Kalina help us make that one of the only gold processing mill tours in the country.

On November 30th 1992, our beloved Town Hall burned down. The mine had shut down the year before, leaving us reeling about the loss of our way of life. We had to save this beautiful building, the center of our town. We got \$1500 each from the Colorado Historical Society and the National Trust for Historic Preservation to get a structural engineer into town to inspect the structure and he said it was safe to restore. We did such a good job that we received a National Honor Award from the Trust and we found that we really were the "Mining Town that Never Quit!". We would survive.

But how? The mine had also donated a large tract of land south of the Mill to us. We developed a business park called the Powerhouse PUD to help retain and attract jobs to Silverton. We got grant funds from the Economic Development Administration to build a place for heavy-duty businesses to go, businesses that were not suitable in town. It worked and was a project that was good not only for the Society but our town as well.

And what about the Old 100 Boardinghouse, perched on a cliff 3000 feet above Cunningham Gulch, an incredible structure that needed to be saved. We did it with the help of DRMS, the BLM and helicopters to take materials up. We saved Animas Forks from becoming a pile of sticks with help from the State Historical Fund, Colorado Outward Bound and Americorps. We saved the Denver &

Rio Grande Depot after it was bombed with a stick of dynamite. We saved the Silverton Northern Engine House from collapsing and helped build an outdoor rolling stock museum in the "Narrow Gauge Capital of the World". We have worked with partners like the Town of Silverton, the Durango and Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad, the Durango Historical Railroad Society, and the Hinsdale County and the Ouray County Historical Societies. We raised 14.9 million dollars to save the Red Mountain Mining District and helped to save the little Idarado houses. And our county Road and Bridge crew dug big holes for us to plant interpretive signs around the San Juan Skyway and Alpine Loop.

The Historical Society had been taking care of Hillside Cemetery for over 40 years because the Town of Silverton would not. We have held Cemetery Workday for townspeople and descendants of people buried up there for 29 years. We have helped grieving families to choose plots and have taken them up there to choose a place to bury loved ones. Our Freda Peterson published a 900 page Cemetery Study, which is used by people all over the world. She worked very hard on the cemetery--I remember her pouring diesel fuel on weeds up there and throwing matches and telling her that she would blow herself up!! (She didn't.) Thank you, Russel Thomas, for your 29 years of help!

On faith, we built one of the finest mining museums in the country and an archive that is used year around. We did it, come hell or high water. We have written and received over 30 million dollars in grant monies to preserve our heritage and save what our visitors pay money to see. We have built exhibits with lots of help, and sometimes, with colorful language. We have moved incredibly heavy artifacts and saved them from the dump. And we have helped people find their roots. Most of all, our motto is "Hire Local, Buy Local". We have been so lucky to work with countless volunteers through our 60 years and have had a whale of a time doing so. And that has happened because of you, dear members. Thank you for your support!

*Beu*

## Join the San Juan County Historical Society

*Today!*

Box 154, Silverton, Colorado 81433

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 2024.

I understand the membership entitles me and my spouse, if applicable, to a vote at the Annual Meeting in October 2024.

1. **Member: \$25.00** per year entitles a couple to one vote each in meetings of the general membership, discount on books, and free museum admission.

2. **Family Membership: \$50** per year entitles an individual one vote in meetings of the general membership, discount on books, and free museum admission.

3. **Society Patron: \$100** per year entitles an individual or couple to voting privileges, a museum pass for the season, and discount on books.

4. **Life Member: \$1000** entitles an individual or couple to all of the privileges for life.

Name:

Mailing Address:

Email address:

# Archive Activity Slows — a Little!

By Casey Carroll

The past year saw a decrease in activity, which gave us the opportunity to allocate additional time to our diverse projects. Let's take a look at some noteworthy events that have occurred during this time period...

Kendra Hooper, who spends her summers as a docent at the Museum, also volunteers at the Archive during the winter. Our collection of cataloged artifacts is stored in bins in the vault, and Kendra is currently photographing and uploading these items to the Museum software database. This allows us to view the artifacts without disturbing the originals, unless absolutely necessary. It's a massive task, considering we have around 100 bins filled with these artifacts, ranging from Silverton Northern tickets and menus to diaries, journals, manuscripts, and student theses. We are actively seeking funds to acquire collapsible shelving for the vault, as it is currently too full to accommodate any new items. As a result, artifacts and pictures are piled up outside the vault, utilizing every available space for temporary storage. (We could also use a few more volunteers for such projects!)

Judy Zimmerman, our Facebook "guru", is currently engrossed in the discovery of newly found black and white negatives. With great care, she is examining them and successfully identifying many familiar faces from the past. Whenever she encounters unidentified individuals, her Facebook followers always step in to help. Judy's commitment to the community and her valuable contributions to Facebook are truly praiseworthy. For more information, feel free to visit our society's Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/sjhistoricalsocietysilverton/>.

Gina Rosato, our recently appointed Board Member and Assistant Archivist, has been an invaluable resource. Her diverse talents and expertise in various areas make her a significant asset to the Society. Also, Gina's exceptional skills as a Graphics Designer have been utilized to benefit the Society. Thank you, GINA!

Last year, Susan Jones and her team from the Animas Museum in Durango, paid us a visit and brought along some large maps for scanning using our 44" scanner. It's always a pleasure to help them out, especially considering the invaluable assistance they have provided us with in the past. Whether we're in Silverton or at the Animas Museum, the time spent together is always enjoyable. The team from the Animas Museum is truly a remarkable group of individuals with whom we are grateful to have a strong bond.

During the fall of the previous year, the Animas Museum hosted a special event that featured Buffalo Soldier re-enactors coming to Durango for an unforgettable weekend. The re-enactors took a scenic train ride to Silverton, where we eagerly awaited their arrival at the Archive. After changing into more casual attire, we all gathered at Memorial Park for a lovely picnic. It was a unique opportunity to listen to the personal stories of some of the re-enactors, some of whom were direct

descendants of the original Buffalo Soldiers. For those interested in learning more about the history of the Buffalo Soldiers, we highly recommend checking out the Animas Museum's YouTube channel for a plethora of informative content: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1TXBQKWVDYc>

Since Zeke Zanoni's passing in September, there is a lingering anticipation among all of us hoping to see him casually stroll into our premises to engage in his work or simply pay us a warm visit. We deeply miss him and yearn for his company. Zeke was truly one of a kind, a unique individual whose existence left an indelible mark on our lives. We cherished those moments when he would drop by for a friendly conversation, creating an atmosphere of joy and camaraderie. As soon as we caught sight of him approaching the Archive, we would quickly retrieve our digital recorder, ready to capture his wisdom and anecdotes. These precious recordings shall forever be preserved in our digital database, serving as a testament to his remarkable presence.

Terry Morris continues to volunteer organizing the Archive's second floor, a task of immense proportions. Scott Fetchenier has been assisting Zeke's son David in sorting through Zeke's extensive collections, which includes logs, notes, and countless photographs, among other things. The process of sifting through everything is still ongoing, as Scott and Terry strive to create space upstairs to accommodate Zeke's life work. Interestingly, we had been storing Vern Parker's wooden dummies upstairs for many years, some of which you may have seen in the Museum's wagon room. Vern Parker, a renowned western painter, owned a shop called the Hitchin' Post on Blair Street. Although Vern passed away long ago, his paintings are still highly sought after by collectors.

Zeke possessed a wealth of knowledge that we have unfortunately lost a large part of with him. It is important to acknowledge that without his foresight, dedication, and extensive collections, our Museum would not exist today. Thanks to his visionary thinking and creative efforts, we have established one of the most exceptional mining museums in the nation. We can proudly say that we have become a World Class Museum.

And while we are giving out kudos, we cannot forget to acknowledge former archivists Allen Nossaman and Freda Peterson for their valuable contributions to Silverton. Their books have left a lasting impact on the town's history and culture.

And last, but not least(!), we want to thank Ray Dileo and Darlene Bolting for spending a lot of time volunteering at the Archives, when we all know they really would rather be out hiking! Thanks, so much!

So, the next time you're in Silverton, make sure that you visit the Mining Heritage Museum, visit Freddie and Mark at the Mayflower Mill Tour, and stop by the Archives and say HELLO!

## Archive Hours

Open Year Around,  
Thursdays 10 to 4  
or by Appointment  
970-387-5609 or

archives@sanjuan  
countyhistoricalsociety.org

# Long-haul Mayflower Restoration Continues

By: D. A. Singer

The San Juan County Historical Society was recently awarded a significant grant from History Colorado's State Historic Fund to complete the next phase of restoration work at the Shenandoah-Dives Mill, locally known as the Mayflower Mill. The grant from the Fund totals \$200,000 and will supplement an overall project budget of \$267,000. The Society Board led by Bev Rich is working to raise a cash match fund for the project of \$67,000. Bev has already secured \$25,000 toward the match from the Colorado Division of Reclamation and Mine Safety. Work in the current phase will focus on the completion of the Assay Office Building and stabilization of the massive coal tank and heavy timber trestle. The most critical stabilization work at the Assay office building began in 2013 and included the construction of a full perimeter concrete stem wall foundation, and replacement of the failing roof membrane, flashings and selective structural roof joist replacement. John Richardson and his crew including Scott Craig, Daren Richardson and John Girodo completed the first phase. Klinke and Lew recently completed the most recent work on the building including interior and exterior door restoration, installation of wall and ceiling vapor barriers and insulation, and have beautifully refinished the interior wood floors, trim, and decorative moldings. In concert with that work, Dave Zanoni installed the plumbing in the last phase as well as the electrical rough-in being done by Gem Electric.

To complete the project and finish it out for occupancy, the final phase of work at the Assay Building, slated for 2024-25, will finish the installation of the building's heating systems, kitchen cabinetry and appliances in the upper and lower rental apartments, and the installation of a code-required emergency egress from the upper floor level. As part of the current grant, the Society will also design and install a new interpretive tour through the main level of the building, in which heritage tourists will be able to view displays related to the Assay process. Bill Jones will be coordinating the development and installation of the interpretive displays as well as the production of a video which will outline the Assay process specific to the Shenandoah-Dives Mill.

Located at the center of the mill complex site, the Assay building served as the center of the company's business including exploration and processing of ore, and housed the offices of Charles Chase. A diorama of Chase's office will be part of the new tour. Papa Chase as he was known, was the General Manager and founding officer of the Shenandoah-Dives Company, and one of Silverton's most famous businessmen. Through Chase's ingenuity several mines located above Arrastra Gulch were consolidated under the Company to process the low-grade ore, typical to Hardrock mining in the San Juans, with new floatation milling and chemical technology that made the extraction and processing of the ore bodies economically viable and brought prosperity to Silverton for over seven decades.

The coal tank and trestle structure is an iconic component of the Mill complex. The trestle was designed for large trucks to load-in bulk deliveries of coal that were dumped into the massive 30-foot diameter tank at the end of dock. The trestle is supported by a series of heavy timber bents constructed of full dimension 8x8 and 3x10 heavy timbers. The legs of each bent are supported by large battered concrete footings and grade beams that support the massive truck deck above. In 2008 a detailed Historic Structures Assessment was prepared by Silverton Restoration Consulting, and an extensive Historic American Engineering Recordation of the entire Mill complex was completed in partnership with the National Park Service. Conditions at the tank and trestle have continued to deteriorate since then, while higher priority work continued. However, the bulk of the work identified in that document remains the same. The current grant will fund the restoration of the coal tank's conical roof and eaves and have the cedar wood staves and steel compression rings of the huge tank cleaned and returned to their historic silver finish. A balance of the massive timber decking, which is severely deteriorated from a century of exposure and industrial use, will be replaced to match original dimensions and species. A low-profile rail will be installed along the deck so visitors taking a tour of the Mill will have access to the trestle deck and its amazing views up Arrastra Gulch.

Once completed, the rehabilitation of the Assay Office building will provide a critical revenue-generating source of rental income for the Society and honor the historic contributions to the floatation milling industry that Charles Chase brought to the San Juans. Each structure within the National Historic Landmark boundary of the Mill complex will continue to be rehabilitated in successive phases, and the preservation of the site will significantly complement the other heritage treasures along the celebrated Alpine Loop. None of the work on this crucial Silverton Landmark would have been possible without the valiant effort of one of San Juan County's best known mining ambassador's and Town elders, Zeke Zanoni, who led the charge to save the Mill complex from demolition and was successful in having the entire complex donated to the Society. Come by the Mill this summer for a tour of the floatation technology that exemplified the Shenandoah-Dives operation and a look at a major preservation project in process.

**Mayflower Mill  
Tour**  
**Monday—Saturday**  
**10 to 4:30**  
**Sunday, Noon—4:30**  
**Season ends Mid-October**



*The massive trestle and coal tank will be receiving attention and restoration in the latest phase of the Mayflower Mill restoration efforts over the next year.*

## Always Something New in Exhibits

By Stephen F. Rich

This past year we have done several interesting projects. In early summer we were approached regarding the proposed donation of a pool table. We weren't sure if it was an appropriate artifact for our museum. We then found that it came from the Waldheim Mansion, owned by the Stoibers of the Silver Lake Mine and Mill. Clay Custer and I went to look at the table and decided we needed to preserve it. We have no other artifacts of the Stoibers, and as their mine was a big producer for Silverton, we (after much back breaking labor) moved the piece to the museum. Did I mention it is a combination Pool/Snooker table and it is constructed of slate? We even acquired the original pool balls and a cue!

Interestingly, a couple of years ago we were donated a rather large HO scale model of the Silver Lake Mill complex. It contains six structures and I am currently constructing a new exhibit of that complex. I need to construct a topographical landscape and place the buildings in their original positions; then comes landscaping, two sections of railroad track and a scale aerial tram tower with two tram buckets. Of course I have to design and construct the enclosure for the display. As the Stoibers owned and operated the Silver Lake properties, we decided to incorporate their pool table into the exhibit. An interesting fact: The man who constructed the model used only a couple photographs from the book, *The Rainbow Route*. The images

used to build the model were an inch or less high in the photographs. It was an ambitious project and it is nearly an exact copy of the original mill complex.

Later last summer, Custer and I salvaged a barn! The heavy snowfall had collapsed the roof on a small 50 year old horse barn. The weathered one by twelve siding was just what we needed to stockpile for future exhibit construction. Prior to the collapse, the building had been water tight so we were able to salvage a lot of dimension lumber also. As a result, we have a complete barn stored in the museum basement for future use.

Last fall, life member Ken Vaughn, donated his excellent condition 2003 Ford Ranger 4WD pickup truck to the Society. We were delighted to finally have a truck we could drive out of town when needed. Our old truck is still around and we can use it for carrying heavy loads around town. Thank you again Ken!

A few years ago Ken volunteered to build an HO scale model of the Martha Rose Smelter. The original was located at the edge of town near Highway 550. The kit, with 100s of pieces took Ken hundreds of hours to construct. It is a thing of beauty, and truly makes our exhibit of Silverton smelters something special. Thanks Ken!

In September 2023 we lost a dear friend and my exhibit partner of thirteen years, Zeke Zanoni. He lived for two days past his 87th birthday and he worked right up until the end.

## Visit the Museum

Daily 10:00 to 4:30

May 25th to Mid-October

### San Juan County Historical Society

#### Officers and Directors, 2024

Beverly Rich, Chairman

Scott Fetchenhier, Secretary/Treasurer

Jerry Hoffer, Patty Dailey, Gina Rosato

Stephen Rich, Kim Davy Eisner,

Directors

# San Juan County Historical Society's Night at the Museum and 60th Anniversary Celebration

## Join us for this Exciting Event

On Saturday, September 7 at 4 p.m. the Society will host a Celebration of its 60th Anniversary at the Mining Heritage Center and 1902 County Jail, 1571 Greene Street in Silverton. The celebration is being held in partnership with the KSJC: Silverton Community Radio, Silverton Public School and the Silverton Creative District: Silverton Creates, as part of a week-long celebration of the arts.

One of the highlights of the event will be the Vern Parker Art Auction. It will be featuring works generously donated by his son Allen Parker. (See related story for more about this unique artist.) Proceeds from the auction will directly benefit the Society, enabling it to continue its mission of preserving and promoting Silverton and San Juan County's rich heritage.

Another highlight will be Local Silverton Youth Art Exhibit: Celebrate the creativity and talent of Silverton's youngest artists with a captivating exhibit showcasing their vibrant works.

The evening will give you the opportunity to tour the Museum and Jail: Immerse yourself in history with self-guided tours of our world-class museum and jail. From exploring artifacts that chronicle Silverton's past to stepping inside the cells of yesteryear, this

is an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of our town's heritage over the past 150 years.

In all the Society wants to take this opportunity to honor its staff, donors and prior contributors: We would like to recognize the dedication and passion of the individuals who have played pivotal roles in shaping the San Juan County Historical Society over the past six decades. From our committed staff to the generous contributions of our donors and volunteers, their efforts have been instrumental in our success.

If you are not already a member, please take advantage of our Membership Drive and Fundraising Event and become a part of our legacy by joining and contributing to our fundraising efforts. Your support ensures the continued preservation of Silverton and San Juan County's history for generations to come.

Please contact Gina Rosato/  
Email: [gina@creativecrackerjack.com](mailto:gina@creativecrackerjack.com) with questions or suggestions.

We look forward to welcoming you to our *Night at the Museum & 60th Anniversary Celebration*—an evening filled with art, history, and community camaraderie (and maybe even a light snack).



*Fifteen years after opening as a museum, the 1902 jail suffered a major setback when the heavy snows of the 1978-79 winter collapsed the roof of the building, forcing temporary museum relocation itoa house on Greene Street while repairs were made. This 1981 picture shows the new roof on what appears to be a neglected building. The facing porch on the southwest side had been destroyed in an unfortunate collision with a motor vehicle.*

## Classic Jail Becomes Classic Museum

The construction in 1902 of a state-of-the-art jail in Silverton was a great source of local pride, much of it based on the fact that no outside funds were needed to be raised to construct the structure.

The request for bids on the building specified two story brick structure 32 x 38 plus a basement which would contain the heating plant. The first floor was to be devoted to living quarters for the jailer and two cells for insane patients.

On the second floor would be four "tool proof" cells, one juvenile cell, one female cell, and one hospital cell with bath. Although converted to display space, this is pretty much the configuration a visitor will find today.

The jail was designed by the Pauly Jail Building and Manufacturing Company, an Indiana firm started in 1856 and still in the business today.

The building, with a little help here and there over the years has now survived 122 years, now serving as the core structure of the San Juan County Historical Society's Museum complex.

The jail was built by Thomas Edwards of Silverton for a bid price of

\$12,175. For the curious, that is equal to about \$444,000 in 2024 dollars.

It served as a county jail for about twenty years but reduced crime and population saw it fall into disuse until sometime in the 1930s when it became a poor house for elderly miners. After the Second World War it was unused until the 1964 conversion to a museum. Most of the work on the building for the next 40 plus years was cosmetic with the exception of the 1980 roof replacement.

Volunteers with scrub buckets and buckets of paint kept the building open but time was dealing its unfriendly hand. In 2008 a multi-year major reconstruction/restoration project was undertaken leading to the more usable and frankly safer and more sustainable building. A properly done roof, window rebuilding, basement conversion to useable space and a tunnel to the new mining building were all a part of the project.

Increased patronage with the income it generates should allow the Society to maintain the building in good order for another 100 years.

## The Story of Vern Parker, Our Featured Artist

Vern Parker was born in May, 1889, to James Madison Parker, wagon master and blacksmith, and Anna Bills, in Hanford, California. He and his twin sister were the last of seven children. Little is known of his early years.

He became best-known as a painter and woodcarver in the 40s and 50s when he carved gates and signs for the wealthy ranchers and landowners in Santa Ynez, California. His carvings remain on display at the Santa Ynez Historical Museum, and a stagecoach carving can still be seen above the entrance of Mattai's Tavern, former stagecoach stop, now a popular restaurant in Los Olivos, California.

He then moved to Benson, Arizona where he had a studio and gift shop with his wife Eloise and stepson

Allen for many years. The walls of the Horseshoe Cafe in Benson hold his murals and can still be seen there.

It was in Benson that his exquisite horse paintings became published as postcards by Petley Studios in Phoenix. The postcards are still very popular and collectible. Parker eventually moved to Silverton, Colorado and was a colorful town figure as an artist and woodcarver, having his own studio and gift shop for over twenty-five years.

For many years, he divided his time among Silverton, Benson and Tucson, but finally settled in Silverton where he died July 4, 1978. His ashes are scattered at Animas Forks, Colorado, a ghost town near the Continental Divide.

## Action by a Few, Sixty Years Ago, Lead to Our Top-Rated Museum.

In 1964, a group of interested citizens began promoting the idea of having a formal museum in the long unused 1902 county jail, located next to the courthouse. At the same time a formal organization to run such a museum was also discussed and by the end of 1964, papers had been filed to incorporate the San Juan County Historical Society.

Incorporators on the original papers were Ian "Sandy" Thompson, Allen Nossaman, Helen Salfisberg, Fern and Dave Howes, and Prof. Robert Delaney of Fort Lewis College.

The July 24, 1964 Silverton Standard's lead story was headlined "Chamber Names Museum Group". The lead read:

"The Silverton Chamber of Commerce Wednesday evening voted to take on the establishment of a museum

in the old county jail, and appointed a five-man committee to work on the project.

"The museum idea has been debated for years, and the chamber decided to appoint a committee to work with the aim of opening the building as a museum next spring." Ian Thompson was appointed chairman of the committee.

"One of the committee's first steps will be to contact the county commissioners to work out arrangements for the use and maintenance of the building." Chamber president Lew Parcell said "The trouble with us is that none of us want to work. We've all got our own troubles."

As it turned out, the members of the committee did want to work and in less than a year the museum was open for business.

### For Further Reading

A lengthy and very detailed story of the first 40 years of the Society's life may be found in the 2005 San Juan Courier, a link for which will be found on the Society's website, <https://sanjuancountyhistoricalsociety.org/>

## 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.*

Edited by George Chapman

**Join us now — details on page 2.**