

JERRY HOFFER

IN MEMORIAM

Molly Barela and George Niederauer

Jerry Hoffer, 86, suffered a major stroke Friday night, September 19, and died September 23 at 11 PM at the Hospice in Grand Junction. Earlier that Friday Jerry was participating in our moving Silverton Baggage Car 5 onto trucks and into the Silverton Northern engine house.

Jerry was born in Warsaw, Indiana, April 10, 1939. He married Nancy Jean Pullen on May 27, 1962. Jerry and Nancy, a high school senior, met while Jerry was a student at Purdue University, where Nancy's father, Dr. Pullen, was a geology professor. Jerry graduated in 1961 with a degree in electrical engineering. Jerry was drafted into the Army that November and worked on propulsion and trajectory systems at Redstone Arsenal in Huntsville, Alabama.

After the Army Jerry worked in the color television division at RCA Laboratories in Camden, New Jersey. He invented the stabilizing module for tube television color TV, which we all grew up on! Of course, at the time as an employee, the credit for perfecting color TV went to corporate RCA, not the individual.

Fulfilling his dream to move to Colorado, in 1966 he got a job with Honeywell International near Denver and moved to Northglenn, Colorado, a few miles north of Denver. He met many fellow model railroaders and train enthusiasts and began editing and publishing the *Slim Gauge News* magazine out of his garage. In 1976 he moved the family – Nancy, Laura, Molly, and Clark – to Silverton, Colorado, to work with Sundance Publications, which had set up in the train depot. About the *Slim Gauge News* Bob Brown said, "This excellent magazine was firm competition to *Finelines*, and I was impressed. It was put together by a large group under the editorship of Jerry Hoffer. A complimentary copy was sent out in November 1970, followed by one year of bi-monthly issues and then three years (I think) of quarterly issues until their last issue in Winter of 1972. That would be 18 issues, not counting the complimentary debut issue." Bob suggested merging the *Slim Gauge News* and *Finelines* into a new publication, *Narrow Gauge & Short Line Gazette*. They decided Jerry Hoffer would be the Rocky Mountain editor, Bob Brown the overall editor, and Charles Givens the publisher. Later, Sharon Olsen took over the design and layout of the magazine (she also designed the DRHS logo).

Soon after moving to Silverton he got a job with the Standard Metals Mining Corporation. He loved spelunking, so working in the mine, added to his fascination of being underground. During all the ups and downs of the mining industry in the 70s, 80s and 90s, Jerry would leave when the mine shut down and move the family out of town to take another job in the electrical engineering industry. As soon as the mine reopened, he



Jerry Hoffer

Molly Barela



Jerry Hoffer sitting on the pilot (cow catcher) of Casey Jones.

Casey Carroll

All photos by George Niederauer unless otherwise specified.



The founders of the *GAZETTE* at its first outing, the NMRA National Convention in Dayton, Ohio, in 1975: Charles Givens, Publisher, Jerry Hoffer, Rocky Mountain Editor, Bob Brown, Editor, Gordon Cannon, Art Director.

Bob Brown



The last issues of *Finelines* and *Slim Gauge News* and first issue of the *GAZETTE*.

Bob Brown

equipment, many of which were published in magazines and books, including Robert E. Sloan's *A Century + Ten of D&RGW Narrow Gauge Freight Cars, 1871 to 1981*.

When the Silverton Band was formed, Jerry originally played the trombone, and switched to the tuba because another person also played the trombone. He collected G-scale models of narrow gauge locomotives.

Jerry was a long time member of the San Juan County Historical Society (SJCHS) and was on the Board when the jail roof collapsed in 1979. He was off the board for a while when the mine shut down in 1991. Beverly Rich, also on the board in 1979 and

would take a job back with the mine and move the family back to Silverton. He never let go of the house in Silverton; it was his heart and his place to be. (The historic house had first belonged to Cora Mears Pitcher, Otto Mears' daughter.) When the mine closed Jerry took a job with Belfort Laboratories and worked in the nuclear industry out of Kirkland Air Force Base, Albuquerque, New Mexico. He retired in 2004.

Jerry had several hobbies. He photographed many narrow gauge railroad facilities and



Jerry and Scott Fetchenhier installing a mine frame in the Mining Museum.



2009: Jerry paints the end of a narrow gauge tie, cut down from standard gauge size, with asphalt foundation coating.



2012: Jerry tightens a U-bolt nut for a stake on the high side gondola.

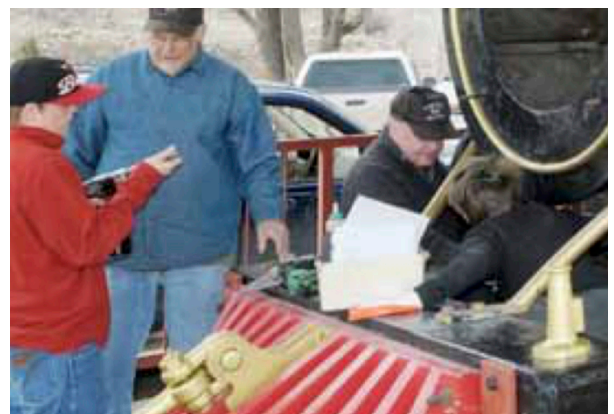
for many years has been its chairman, said Jerry was instrumental in building the Mining Heritage Center and setting up the Mayflower Mill tour. For the past several years he ran the Silverton Northern engine house restoration project, supported George Niederauer with the railcar shed, and together with George developed the Outdoor Railroad Museum in Silverton.

Bev called Jerry "a train buff extraordinaire." She recalled that the engine house suffered several intermittent years of near abandonment in between owners and business operations in the 60s and 70s. In 1978 a heavy snow loading during an early spring storm caused a partial roof collapse at the north end, pushing walls outward and breaking many roof joists. Jerry and Allen Nossaman accomplished emergency stabilization by installing steel cables across the frame and repairing damaged roof joists and broken plates. Another heavy snow year in 1994 caused the roof to partially collapse a second time. This time Jerry and others installed posts along the center of the structure to support ceiling joists and reinforced rafters along three-quarters of the west side of the roof.

DRHS, with no practical location along the D&S track available in Durango or the Animas Valley for displaying the 315 and some restored railcars, formed a cooperative effort in 2008 with SJCHS to restore their two-stall Silverton Northern engine house in Silverton. We shared one side for storing the 315 and the other side for SJCHS rail equipment. DRHS invited SJCHS to supply one of their board members to join the DRHS board. Jerry led their railroad-related work, so he also became a DRHS board member that fall. In 2009, with a grant from the State Historical Fund, DRHS led the first phase: restoring the engine house track and reconstructing about 1800 feet of Silverton Railroad track along Cement Street; Jerry was co-leader with George Niederauer. For the



2011: Duane Danielson, Tom Artzberger, Jerry Hoffer, and Ron Nott (in cab) lift a top side rail in place on *Emma Sweeny* (called *Amador Cannonball* in Jackson, Amador County, California).



2014: Jerry advising boy scout Cordell Schneider on flag stand installation.



2015: Jerry and Duane Danielson maneuver the brake reservoir and mounting brackets off the flanger deck so decking can be replaced.



2016: TOP – Ron directs concrete pouring, while Jerry trowels it level. BOTTOM – Joe Weigman, Jerry, and Ron and Judy (who took photo) finish removing forms.



2016: Jerry installs one of eight hand holds along edge boards on the flanger.



2017: Jerry lays electrical conduit between oil shed and engine house.

Judy Schlueter



Judy Schlueter

2016: Jerry, Doug and Ron erect the third wall of the oil shed.



2018: Jerry paints red oxide primer on a flatcar reinforcing steel angle iron.

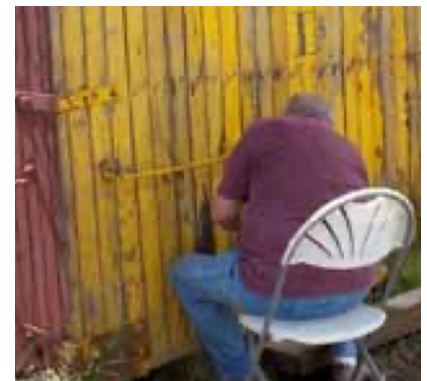
subsequent four phases to fully restore the engine house, Jerry was the leader of the SJCHS project with George assisting. The final phase ended this fall.

Jerry led the effort in reconstructing a section of track on the scale pit of the Rose-Walsh Smelter and adding a boxcar painted for the period, at the southwest corner of Silverton.

Russell Thomas of Westminster, Colorado, who first worked with Jerry in August 2014 to help with the engine house, commented, "I went in to a very dark creaky building that I wondered how it was even standing. Over the past ten years I learned that Jerry was the reason it was. ... Over the years I have learned so much history about the engine house and the area that could never be taught in any classroom

or presented in any book. He stabilized, painted patched built, crafted every corner of that building that other people or organizations would have been content to see be a wood pile. ... I asked him what brought him to Silverton, I saw a sparkle in his eye and all he said was "The trains!" The engine house was just the latest project. It "isn't a position of status. It's massively more important; it's hard time-consuming work that many people never really appreciate what it takes to save and maintain the engine house, the museum, the jail, the mill. All important; all worth saving."

For years Ron and Judy Schlueter of St. Charles, Missouri, came each summer. Ron said Jerry "would always have a project lined up that we could help with, whether on the engine house or oil shed. He had a clear vision on how the work should be accomplished and how to best make that goal



2019: Jerry scrapes the Reefer 54 body to prepare for painting.



2021: Jerry installs a fluorescent light fixture in the oil shed.



2023: Jerry stands beside flanger and 315 interpretive sign.



2025: Jerry and Ron install a panel in the bathroom.
Judy Schlueter



2024: Jerry installs plumbing in wall of engine house bathroom.
Judy Schlueter



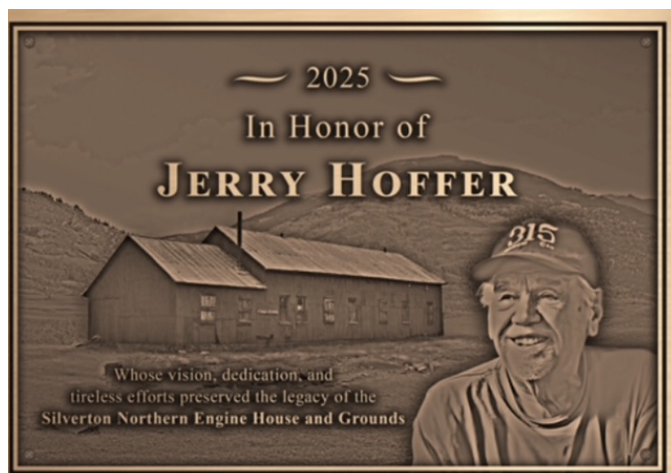
2024: Jerry installs electrical panel for a welder and other tools outside the oil shed.
Judy Schlueter

happen. Jerry had a low tolerance for contractors who didn't perform to his expectations, but he always seemed to figure out what to do to correct any issues."

George Niederauer first met Jerry as a member of the San Juan Large Scalpers, mainly a garden railway club that was also the founder of DRHS. George said, "Jerry was instrumental in developing the Outdoor Railroad Museum in Silverton. It would not have been developed without his hard work and his knowledge. His expertise in building and track construction were crucial in developing and executing the plans for the structures and detailed layout. I have never had a better partner in historical restoration activities. He had a keen eye for achieving historical accuracy and modern functionality. He leaves a big hole that will be hard to fill."



19 Sep 2025: Jerry at the engine house, observes moving the baggage car body – his last day with us. R on Schlueter



The Plaque for Jerry

One day Russell Thomas was talking to Molly Barela, Jerry's daughter, about how Jerry dedicated so much time and energy into the engine house and because of his age it would be his last project. Jerry hoped to finish it in 2025, if enough volunteers and contractors would do their part. Molly suggested a plaque on the engine house honoring Jerry. Molly supplied the photo. Molly and Russell designed it. Russell took it to the board of directors of the San Juan County Historical Society, and they favored the idea. Russell found a company to cast the plaque and paid to ship it. Molly paid for the casting.

Molly plans a memorial service for Jerry and a dedication ceremony for the plaque on June 6, 2026. Jerry wanted the Silverton Brass Band to play at his funeral and his ashes spread in the pit at the engine house.