We Are What We Eat
~ Sharing Our History Through Food ~
Angel food cake. No frosting. That's the dessert of choice for my birthday, which just might be related to my grandmother's skill at baking a perfect angel food cake. We all have those foods that are a part of our family's history. In fact, a family's history could be told through their food. The family that serves rigatoni at Thanksgiving alongside the turkey savors their Italian heritage. On a larger scale, the same is true for society.

In this issue of History La Plata we will explore our history as seen through the food that has sustained our community over the years. Food connects humanity, not only as life giving nourishment, but socially. This common element gives us a valuable tool to study our past. We hope it makes you hungry for more history, and inspires you to read a great book, visit a local museum…or bake an angel food cake.

The La Plata County Historical Society has always been devoted to sharing with our community. We have found so many ways to inform others about our colorful local history. The society owned Animas Museum has a wealth of information it makes available to area residents as well as people who contact us from all parts of the world.

It is so exciting to help someone find information about a relative or a story from an event that happened in our area. Discussing an item from our collection with someone who has a connection to it is so rewarding. One of our main goals is to share our area's history with local students from kindergarten to college age.

The Museum is involved in field trips, history projects, travelling history trunks, History Day and lectures, all involving our area youth. YOU are responsible for the society's ability to be involved in all these wonderful experiences. Without your financial support the Museum would not be able to share our rich history with others. Thank you for that support and I hope you will continue to help LPCHS in the future.

The Museum is located at 3065 West 2nd Avenue in Durango. On the corner of 31st Street and West 2nd Avenue
970-259-2402 • animasmuseum@frontier.net

Kathy C. McKenzie is President of the La Plata County Historical Society Board of Directors and is a 4th generation native of La Plata County.
What’s for dinner…deer? Prehistoric Diet in Southwest Colorado

by Mona Charles

Food sources of the prehistoric peoples of Southwest Colorado were more varied than one might imagine. Living off the land meant finding food that was “native” to the area. Free to hunt and gather without ties to agricultural plots may have made for a more diversified palette. Living in the verdant valleys of Southwest Colorado, plants and animals that were available for the diet may have included wild tubers, grains, berries, nuts and seeds, and a large spectrum of animals. These plants and animals provided much more than food to the prehistoric populations. Large mammals such as deer furnished hides for clothing and shelter, bones and antlers for tools, sinew for cordage, hooves for rattles and other objects for domestic and ceremonial use.

Archaeologists can reconstruct the prehistoric diet through different methods. Direct evidence for edibles is available through macro and microscopic studies of plant residues, seeds and pollen grains. These remains are often found in the dirt excavated from cooking hearths, roasting pits or ovens, and storage pits. In dry shelters, plant remains can be preserved. One example of excellent preservation from the Durango area is a cache of amaranth seeds in a woven bag. Amaranth was a native plant that often grew in disturbed soils. The seeds were collected and ground into a type of flour. Wild tomatillo purslane, wild sunflower, Indian ricegrass and winged pigweed are but a few of the plants whose remains have been found from local archaeological sites. Piñon pine nuts are flavorful and nutrient rich. Surely these culinary delights would have been roasted and stored in underground earthen cists. Because piñon trees do not produce nuts each year in every location, groups would have traveled far to harvest them. Chokecherry, lemonberry and serviceberry were eaten raw or blended with other foods. Mormon tea and rose hips were steeped for drink.

Another avenue that archaeologists use to identify prehistoric food acquisition and consumption is through artifacts that are directly related to food processing. For example, grinding implements changed when corn was added to the diet. Large trough grinding slabs (metates) and two-hand grinding stones (manos) greatly increased the production of corn flour and were preferred over the small one-hand mano/basin metate duo. Pottery was probably introduced around the same time as beans were domesticated. Boiling water, before pottery vessels, was accomplished by placing heated rocks in watertight woven bags. Snares and nets were used to catch small terrestrial game such as hares, gophers, porcupines, and some birds, while the atlatl (spear thrower) and the bow and arrow were used on large game animals. Large game animals available for ancient Southwest Coloradans were dominated by mule deer followed by mountain sheep, mountain goat and pronghorn. Elk, abundant in the area today, were probably only around in small numbers as revealed by the scarcity of their bones in the local archaeological sites.

Corn, beans, squash and pumpkins, which were introduced into Southwest Colorado during the Basketmaker II and Basketmaker III periods sometime between about 500 B.C. and 500 A.D., changed life forever for the inhabitants of Southwest Colorado. Domestication of these crops allowed the people to settle in one place and form communities. The population grew and prospered until about 1250 A.D. when the climate changed and droughts made it difficult to continue a cultigen-dependent lifestyle. Eventually the ancestral Puebloans migrated to the south and west. After the great migration, the Utes settled Southwest Colorado. These hunter-gatherers roamed freely living much like the pre-agriculturalists until the reservation period. At which time, the Ute bands suffered from lack of access to native foods. Subsistence stress occurred and they became dependent on government rations. Supplemental resources such as cambium, the fleshy inner bark of the Ponderosa Pine trees, provided much needed nutrients during this transitional period.

A mano (Spanish for hand) and metate (large stone with a grinding surface and a basin for holding foodstuff) from the Animas Museum’s Permanent Collection. The mano was held in one or both hands and was moved back and forth over the larger stone to grind seeds, nuts and other hard materials. Photo courtesy of La Plata County Historical Society

Mona Charles owns the archaeological consulting firm, Powderhorn Research LLC, focusing on the Basketmaker II/III period of the American Southwest. She is also interested in geophysical surveys, geoarchaeology, and historic archaeology.
Early Spanish explorers noted precious metals in the San Juans, but little was done to extract the minerals until the 1870s. After the Civil War, adventurers streamed into Colorado hoping to strike it rich with gold or silver. The Brunot Agreement of 1873 opened the San Juans to prospectors. The first small mining operations grew larger and many mines were operated by large companies. Large mines required large workforces and those miners had to be fed.

While some miners lived with their families in houses located in towns, most miners were “batching it.” They might have been actual unmarried bachelors, or merely living away from their families. Single miners living near towns could dine in restaurants, many of which offered meal tickets which gave the diner a good value. For workers in remote areas, meals were served at the mine’s boarding house.

The boarding house was an important part of the mining operation. Properly managed, they could turn a profit charging miners $1 a day for room and board, paid from wages of $3 a day. Good cooks were important, serving to attract new workers and to help retain employees, as miners were known to relocate for better food. Mine owners also believed that delicious meals made for happier miners, who would be less likely to strike. A bad cook at the Sunnyside mine caused a strike when work stopped until the owner promised to hire a better cook. Many cooks were men but for a woman, particularly a widow, it was a respectable career. With wages up to 50% more than the miners made, competition could be keen for a cook’s position. Cooking at a small mine was generally a one cook operation, but larger mines had multiple cooks, helpers, waiters and “flunkies” (the lowliest assistant to the kitchen staff).

Cooks prepared 4 meals a day to feed the 3 shifts that kept the mine operating around the clock. The kitchen workers’ day began at 4 or 5 in the morning as they prepared a breakfast of eggs, hot cakes, biscuits & gravy and meat. After breakfast the miners would pick up a mid-shift lunch to take with them into the mine. A sandwich (bologna, egg or ham) and a piece of pie were put in a divided lunch box. The bottom section held liquids and by setting the box on a stand of 4 nails pounded into a board, coffee or tea could be heated with a candle stub. Supper consisted of soup, roast beef, codfish and cream, stew, potatoes, stewed or canned vegetables and pie or pudding for dessert. Meals were served family style from bowls and platters passed around the tables and refilled by the flunkie. Most large mines used hotel china.

As soon as one meal ended, the cook began preparation for the next. Cooking at high altitude was a challenge. Water boils at a lower temperature so boiled potatoes, dried beans and hard-boiled eggs took too long to cook to be practical. Using a pressure cooker was apt to result in a geyser of beans and juice. Because yeast worked faster at high altitude, bread would have a hollow space in the middle. Therefore hotcakes and biscuits (with a high percentage of lard) were more popular. Food was not wasted; leftovers were minced into hash or baked into pasties popular with the Cornish miners. Coffee was a sore spot. Miners complained that most cooks’ coffee was better suited for floor varnish.

Coffee aside, most food was wholesome and tasty. Local merchants valued the mine’s business and took care to sell quality ingredients. Grocery stores and general stores sold durable goods. Produce was grown in valleys in the area. Beef was the preferred meat; cattle were held in pens behind the butcher shop until needed. Dining was an important part of a miner’s day. As their traditional song says;

“Hold the forks the knives are coming
Spoons are on the way;
Pass the hash along the table
Head that cow this way.”

Carolyn Bowra is the director of the Animas Museum and a notoriously poor cook.
Early pioneers in La Plata County faced a vast wild country made up of mountains, mesas and river valleys, yet they managed to develop thriving farms and ranches throughout the county, providing food for themselves and others.

Savvy farmers and ranchers zeroed in on the Animas Valley. Frank Hall wrote in 1895 that within days after the Utes agreed to the terms of the Brunot Agreement in September of 1873, “…every acre of available land in the (Animas) Valley had been located and staked off in ranch claims…”, even though the agreement was not ratified until April of 1874. When renowned photographer William Henry Jackson traveled through the Valley in September of 1874, he saw ripening crops in the fields. Soon the wheat, oats and potatoes were supplemented by strawberries and fruit from newly planted orchards. Thomas Kerr, one of the earliest farmers in the valley, built a thriving farm with 240 acres of orchards and garden produce. He also built a 20 x 100 foot greenhouse producing hot-house vegetables in all seasons, raised Holstein cattle, and grew potatoes and alfalfa.

The flourishing population in the Animas Valley inspired an investment partnership to plat the new town of Animas City in 1876, the same year that the settlement of Hermosa obtained an official U.S. Post Office. Kerr and his neighbors fed these burgeoning communities and the hopeful miners headed towards Silverton.

Pioneers also moved onto the promising land near the Pine and Florida Rivers where they raised livestock and crops that they, too, sold to the residents of Silverton and travelers coming into the country. A popular travel guide in 1885 called Crofutt’s Grip-Sack Guide relished the hotel dinners offered to travelers at the small (but no longer standing) community of Pine River “…where we were reminded of the chicken, and that it laid eggs, and found the meals well cooked without being wallowed in grease…”

The Hatcher and Dyke partnership employed about 40 cowboys at their H.D. Ranch in the 1880s. Some believe the ranch gave the name to the H.D. Mountains. By 1901, a regional booster publication claimed the Bayfield area’s 40,000 head of livestock by far outnumbered the 1500 families in the area. Ironically, many of the farmers and ranchers lived off of wild game, reserving their livestock for paying customers. One old timer remembered, “I never knew what a piece of beef tasted like until I was 17 years old.”

Some of the early farmers and ranchers in the La Plata River drainage were attracted by the waist-deep grasses believed to have inspired the name of Hay Gulch. They had a ready market in the soldiers at Fort Lewis and the miners in the La Plata Mountains. Local beef and produce supported a thriving packing business that hauled supplies into the high country.

In other parts of the county, entrepreneurs developed small lakes into fish hatcheries. Twin brothers Lee and Wash Patrick created a series of hatcheries in the tributaries of Vallecito Creek, where Wash’s daughter Emerald recalled, “Dad would take a spring wagon at dark of night and load it with buckets of clean fish, and cover them with gunny
**From Farm to Table - 1874 Style**

Sacks and head for Durango. He had to stop at every creek and throw water on them to keep them fresh. He'd get into Durango at daylight and would sell them at the Strater Hotel for a dollar a pound. That was a real good price in those days."

Locally produced meats and produce at an everyday meal in 1880 might now be considered a fine dining experience. With the renewed interest in and support for locally produced food, one wonders what these early ranchers and farmers would think of our farm-to-table movement today.

**Festive Fare ~ 1875**

For settlers throughout the American West, Christmas was a time to set aside the drudgery and isolation of daily life and create a tie to their former lives back East. This was certainly true in the Animas Valley as the first five families settled in for the Christmas of 1875. Since fancy presents and decor Range with 30 head of dairy cows and found a good business selling milk and dairy products to the miners in the camps around Silverton. They claimed 160 acres just south of Baker's Bridge and established their new home that fall. That December, Mrs. Pinkerton and her daughters cooked the first Christmas dinner in the Valley. They invited all of the neighbors to the feast. Martha Roberts, who homesteaded with her husband at Hermosa, fondly remembered the food served at that first Christmas dinner and her memories are preserved in the book *Pioneers of the San Juan Country*. The menu included “beef (served in many different ways), baked beans, potatoes, squash, cold slaw (sic), pickles, dried peach pie, stewed dried apples, cup cakes, homemade bread, coffee and tea”.

For the single men who gathered around Nellie Pinkerton singing carols after dinner, it must have been a welcome break that reminded them of happy times spent with their own families. For us, the homey menu is a nostalgic tie to the past.

Susan H. Jones

**Historic Orchards of Hermosa**

The Hermosa area is believed to be the earliest permanent settlement in the Animas Valley. Scattered references indicate that settlers began establishing farms and homesteads as early as 1873. Records indicate that the first settlers in the valley were concentrated near the junction of Hermosa Creek and the Animas River. The small settlement and surrounding farms were well-established and beginning to produce crops by 1874 and by the spring of 1875, the farms began supplying food to Silverton. Later, produce was transported to the mining areas around Silverton via the new Animas Canyon Toll Road developed by Wightman and Wallace. Road work began in 1876 with traffic using the incomplete road by August 1877 and full use by summer of 1878. Some of the food items supplied to Silverton included melons, flour and potatoes.

Historical records, family information and descendant accounts indicate the little settlement grew as local farms continued to provide fresh produce to the mining camps. In 1876, T. A. Kerr and Charles Dudley established a grist mill to produce flour. In 1877 Dudley established the first orchard in the warm air drainage along Hermosa Creek, providing apples and cider to Silverton and the high mountain camps. Kerr purchased land and planted an orchard with apples, pears, sweet cherries and plums in 1883. About 1900, Ole Lee, a Norwegian immigrant living in Silverton, settled in Hermosa and established orchards. A few years later, Andrew Buchanan purchased some of Dudley’s orchard land and became a fruit grower. About 1902, Andrew’s brother, Edgar Buchanan, purchased orchards from an early fruit grower that included... (continued)
the 1891 Victorian house built by Charles Fischer, a brewery owner from Silverton. Meanwhile, the Julia Mead family established a dairy farm and orchards near the confluence of Hermosa Creek and the Animas River. In 1903, Ervin Mead was awarded a diploma for “Best Collection of Apples” at the Colorado-New Mexico Fair.

An orchard survey was conducted by the state horticulturalist, E.P. Sandstien in 1922. He indicated the climate was too cool and the growing season too short for growing fruit in most of La Plata County. However, he found fruit growing was well-developed in the temperate climate of Hermosa Creek, where orchards were sheltered and there was a warm air drainage. The orchards surveyed in the 1920s included several in the Hermosa area where a number of varieties of apples were grown.

Today, there are remnants of Hermosa’s fruit growing history; orchards continue along the Hermosa Creek and small groves of fruit trees are scattered around Hermosa. The stately Queen Anne Victorian home owned by the Buchanans is now owned by the Schultz family and it is adjacent to the historic orchards. The T.A. Kerr home remains and it is now listed on the State Register of Historic Places based on extensive research conducted by its present owner, Marie Roessler. Not far away in the peaceful small cemetery, members of the Buchanan, Lee, Dudley, Kerr, Gaines and Mead families are at rest close to their beloved and beautiful Hermosa.

Ruth E. Lambert
and Edward L. Mead
with research assistance from,
Jill Seyfarth and Marie Roessler.

Ruth Lambert is the cultural program director at the San Juan Mountains Association and Ed Mead is a pioneer descendant of the Mead family and a life-long resident of the Animas Valley.

Allison’s Turkey Packers Co-op

During the dark days of the Depression, the residents of La Plata County struggled to survive and, in the rural areas, families helped to sustain themselves as they made the most of their farm produce and livestock. In the Allison area in the Southeast corner of the county, local families developed an innovative enterprise to help them get through those difficult economic times.

The small community of Allison was originally founded in 1881 as the first Denver and Rio Grande Railway westbound siding and stop in La Plata County. Originally named Vallejos, the siding consisted of several facilities including a warehouse, section house, bunkhouse and later a small passenger and freight depot. In the 1930s, the warehouse was acquired by the Turkey Packers Co-op. The Co-op was an agricultural cooperative venture that was directed by local officers and involved many area farmers and ranchers. It was founded to provide income for farm families during the Depression. This operation included the transport of turkeys grown on local farms and ranches to the Co-op where they were packed for shipment to the East on the railroad. One early resident remembers turkey-filled farm wagons lined up outside the warehouse. Other residents recall plucking turkey pin feathers to prepare the birds for sale. As operations grew, the warehouse was expanded to include a shed addition with wire window screens where turkeys were held for shipment. The Co-op was most active during the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays when as many as 13 railroad carloads of turkeys were shipped out during the holidays. The turkey operations continued during the Depression and throughout World War II. After that, the price of turkeys dropped, health standards changed and the turkey business was discontinued.

Today, the T.A. Kerr home remains and it is now listed on the State Register of Historic Places based on extensive research conducted by its present owner, Marie Roessler. Not far away in the peaceful small cemetery, members of the Buchanan, Lee, Dudley, Kerr, Gaines and Mead families are at rest close to their beloved and beautiful Hermosa.

Ruth E. Lambert

Ruth Lambert is the cultural program director at the San Juan Mountains Association and Ed Mead is a pioneer descendant of the Mead family and a life-long resident of the Animas Valley.

The west side of the Turkey Packer’s Co-op in Allison in January 2009. The old railroad line ran about were the old vehicle is situated. Photo courtesy of R.E. Lambert
Feeding an Army

Feeding an army on the frontier could be a difficult and challenging job. A United States soldier’s ration left much to be desired and complaints about the food were widespread. Many soldiers would complain about the quality or lack of variety of the food, but the preparation of meals was also a source of discontent. Under army regulations, each company handled its own mess (military term for food preparation and serving). The company commanders detailed men for ten-day tours as cooks and bakers, with the result being miserably cooked food. An investigating board in 1878 produced a cooking manual and endorsed a movement to have cooks and bakers specially enlisted and trained. Although repeatedly urged by leading officers, this reform did not win approval until after the frontier period.

The officers and enlisted men at these frontier posts constantly sought ways to add variety to the diet. In some localities hunting and fishing provided a welcome diversion as well as opportunities for enriching the menu; deer, elk, grouse, pheasant, wild turkey, and trout could go far toward easing the perpetual displeasure over rations. Officers’ families frequently kept chickens, pigs, or even a cow, and most garrisons attempted to cultivate vegetable gardens, but more often than not drought, hail, or frost wrought disaster.

In 1880, Fort Lewis was moved from Pagosa Springs to a site south of Hesperus and along the La Plata River. Frontier residents relied on hunting and fishing to add variety to their diet. Officers’ families kept chickens, pigs, or even a cow, and most garrisons attempted to cultivate vegetable gardens, but more often than not drought, hail, or frost wrought disaster.
army forts for medical help, protection from Indians, and to help maintain law and order. However, the establishment of a fort was also a huge economic boon to the region and residents in Durango and Farmington, New Mexico were thrilled with the establishment of a fort near them. Fort Lewis was no different from other posts when it came to the issue of food. In order to help improve the morale and health of the garrison, not to mention reducing the complaints, securing the best possible food and supplies for the company messes and officers’ tables was paramount. Feeding the troops at Fort Lewis required many supplies. For example, it has been noted that in October of 1880, 1st Lt. Harry Cavenaugh ordered 12,000 pounds of potatoes, 2,500 pounds of onions, 20 cases of condensed milk, and 300 pounds of oatmeal for the troops at Fort Lewis. On one occasion a shipment of flour was of such poor quality, 600 pounds had to be purchased from another company.

Residents eagerly bid on the wide variety of contracts posted by the army for these large quantities of supplies and this provided local businessmen and farmers another market for their goods. Fresh vegetables from company gardens resolved some of the food problems but the post’s elevation and unpredictable rainfall limited what could be grown. The water supply problem was somewhat mitigated by irrigation water from the La Plata River and ditches from a reservoir which irrigated the vegetable gardens and the trees planted around the parade ground. At Fort Lewis, it was reported that to break the boredom, soldiers planted gardens and held contests for the best fruits and vegetables which they raised on 12-14 acres set aside for that purpose.

Providing beef to frontier army posts was generally viewed as one of the most lucrative businesses. In the Four Corners, Fort Lewis became the prize. Early in the establishment of Fort Lewis, several cattlemen would contend for the Fort’s beef contract. One of the first was Bloomfield stockman William Haines who haggled with the army over the contract to provide fresh beef to Fort Lewis. Essentially, Haines and the army had agreed to a price per pound. Shortly after the price per pound on the open market spiked upward and Haines felt he could no longer provide beef at the agreed upon price. The army felt there was no need to renegotiate the contract. They also decided the quality of the beef was not worth the increased price and eventually decided to give the contract to another bidder. The process for winning the beef contract proved to be a major source of trouble for the contractors who held it. The contractor had to keep a large and steady supply of cattle in the La Plata River area. With the area’s sparse population, the cattle became a tempting target for thieves and suspect businessmen. Feeding the large numbers of soldiers at Fort Lewis made it the largest user of cattle in the region. The source of beef for the army was subject of much strife. In essence, stolen cattle could be slaughtered at the fort, which then allowed legally owned cattle to be spared and sold elsewhere. Individuals like the Eskridge brothers, Bert Wilkinson and the Stockton brothers, Ike and Porter, became infamous for this illicit cattle trade and it would eventually lead to violent deaths for some of them.

For the soldiers at Fort Lewis, they not only had to deal with the boredom and isolation of a post which did not see much action, but invariably they had to deal with rations that left something to be desired.

---

**Old Fort Lewis Today**

Food continues to be a major focus of activities under the current management of the Old Fort at Hesperus, according to Coordinator Beth Lashell. The mission statement “To support and expand educational opportunities through sustainable management of natural, historical, cultural, community and economic resources of the Old Fort” encompasses both the educational and agricultural food-related activities that are on-going.

The 6,300 acres are an ideal setting for experimenting with high-altitude farming, ranching, and gardening practices and crops. Some of the agricultural activities at the site today include the Old Fort Market Garden, a mentorship program for beginning farmers giving them access to education, land, and water. The program has produced about 30,000 pounds of product per year. There will be nine farmers participating in 2015, the third year of the program.

**Other agricultural activities include:**

1. **Come Alive Outside Garden:** La Plata County 4-H Project with Greg Felsen. Local clubs produce vegetables that are distributed in the community, often at events held in Grange Halls.

2. **Educational Gardens:** FLC students get hands-on opportunities to learn more about organic gardening on a 1/2 acre plot and three high tunnels (greenhouses). Products are sold at the Farm Stand on campus and to local restaurants (Kennebec Cafe and Zia Taqueria). So far this year beets, carrots, radishes, spinach, cilantro, romaine, lettuce mix, arugula, chard and kale have been planted.

3. **Hops Variety Trial:** Nine varieties of hops are being tested at high altitude and brewers are being encouraged to incorporate local hops into their product. For example, Carver’s Brewery used four varieties of hops in an identical recipe and over one hundred people came to its first tasting last year. The project will also develop alternative markets to use fresh and whole cone and dried hops in small quantities for home and craft brewers. This will make small acreage hops yards economically viable in this high altitude environment.

4. **Bee Project:** FLC chemistry department placed ten hives in the historic orchard in 2015 to study mites and their relationship to colony collapse disorder.

5. **Ranching:** FLC owns 55 head of cattle and raises 400 acres of irrigated hay. A local rancher leases grazing land for 200 head for four months a year producing grass-fed beef for local markets.

Jean Campion
My father, Merritt McKenzie, worked for the Durango Herald for over 46 years as a printer, pressman and machinist. Because he worked in so many areas, he had access to a variety ways of playing harmless practical jokes on other people. One of these jokes happened when he was working in the job shop (printing booklets, brochures, menus, etc.). One day in the 1950s he and several other Herald employees went to Easter’s Café for lunch. Easter’s Café was owned by L.B. and Leona Easter and was at 948-50 Main Avenue where the present day Tequila’s is located. My dad had printed a one-of-a-kind menu for this particular joke. When the waitress wasn’t looking, he switched menus. He told the waitress he would have the boiled owl and dumplings! She told him they didn’t serve that item. Dad showed her his menu. She took the menu, telling him she would be right back. When she returned, the waitress said she was sorry but they were all out of boiled owl and dumplings. He never said a word to her about it being a joke. To this day, the boiled owl and dumpling story is often shared when our family is eating out together.

~Kathy McKenzie

Growing up on the 1940’s (living outside of Durango), a highlight was a meal in a restaurant. It usually occurred on a Saturday, as my schooteacher mother had that day to attend to business, visit with her boss (the school superintendent), and go to the grocery store and locker plant. If timing was right, we could count on a meal at the Mandarin Cafe (located on the west side of the 900 block of Main).

The restaurant was one of three Chinese restaurants in town that I remember; the Canton Cafe was nearby and the Western Steakhouse was across from the Strater Hotel. Though Chinese food was featured, our usual choice was a hot roast beef or pork sandwich. It cost about .85 and consisted of a slice of bread, cut diagonally, surrounding real mashed potatoes and topped with hot meat. A liberal portion of homemade brown gravy covered the top and it was a perfect treat for a young child. Occasionally, we had Sam Wong’s chicken noodle soup which featured oyster crackers on the side. Sometimes we considered the dessert option – Jello, usually yellow or green topped with a dollop of whipped cream. Looking back, I believe the Jello was made with less than the recommended amount of water – because it did not ever quiver!!

Sam Wong usually tended the cash register at the front of the restaurant and he always had a supply of fish bait available for sale. It consisted, I think, of some mixture of cheese and other things that could be molded into small balls around a hook. The bait must have worked – for it was always available.

~Sandy Campbell

The New York Bakery was a delightful place for many years.

~Crystal Carroll

Pan Handler Pie was my favorite “teatime” spot after work for many years. Coffee and custard crème pie!

~P.R. Young

A Publication of the La Plata County Historical Society
Restaurant Reminiscing by LPCHS members

Woody Wong fried us trout dinner (Don caught) on our honeymoon Oct. 1, 1968!
—Sandra Mapel

Western Steakhouse memories 1966-1969: Mr. Wong was responsible for the well-being of a large number of Fort Lewis students during these years, because for 85 cents they could get a plate of fried rice (chicken, pork or ham). The rice was molded into a serving bowl that contained at least 4 cups and turned out onto the plate. Tea always came with at least one fortune cookie and if you were really feeling extravagant, a bowl of pork noodles would warm your soul and body.

Mr. Wong kept tabs on grades and progress in school, developing a relationship with most of the students who ate there, often offering kind words of encouragement. He had a knack for ferreting out those students who didn’t have the 85 cents, so a plate of fried rice would often magically appear when they needed it most. No one went away hungry.
—Carole Morain

I remember my parents dancing at Velma’s Supper Club — good steaks, too! Also, Griego’s was the A&W. The Malt Shoppe was another high school hangout. Parson’s had the most delicious egg salad sandwich I’ve ever eaten! The Western Steakhouse had jukeboxes at the tables. Loved to hang out there! The Chief Diner - railroad car had wonderful decorations!
—Claudia Murphy
My sister, Julie McKenzie Campbell and I still talk about the sausage pizza at Richard’s Drive In. In the 1950s she worked at Catchpole Beauty Salon so on payday she would drive us out there to buy a pizza. It was the best in town! I’m sure she used her whole paycheck since she only worked there a few hours a day after school.

~Kathy McKenzie

My parents, Mable and Owen Hafling, both natives and graduates of DHS, had a few favorite restaurants, although we seldom went out for meals. When we did it was to the Mandarin or the Chief. Later my dad and husband would go to the Woolworth’s luncheonette and later the Golden Horseshoe and the Silver Spur. Many old restaurants and fond memories!

~Lois Hafling (aka Crystal Carroll)

In 1923 M.J. (Mike) Brennan built Lighthouse Texaco on north Main Avenue near the present site of Parkway Texaco (17th & Main). With gravity flow gas pumps, garage and a “curb service restaurant” the Lighthouse provided complete service for 1923. Mike’s son Ed took over the family business and then Ed’s son Charlie took over. Today, Charlie’s daughter Judy Schmidt, his sons Dennis, Kelly, Kevin, Charles and Kegan, and grandson Jason Schmidt continue to provide service to the Durango area. Five generations later, during a Texaco convention in the late 90’s, Kevin found out Brennan Oil was “the nation’s oldest wholesaler.” As of 2003, due to the merger between Shell and Texaco, Brennan Oil became an Exxon distributor; still serving you proudly throughout the Durango area.

Exxon
1220 Carbon Jct, Durango, CO 81301
Phone: (970) 259-2499
History in a Half Shell

In 1909, a dissatisfied Durango resident complained that, “the average Durango restaurant will wallow an oyster around in a dab of dope and call it a fried oyster.” Though it may seem strange that early Coloradoans expected quality oysters, by 1909 the saltwater mollusks were widely available. In spite of Colorado’s distance from any saltwater bodies, oyster tins have been found at mining camps and towns throughout the state. Seeking sentimental relief from the landlocked Rocky Mountains, families would share the cost of ordering and shipping canned oysters to the state by mail. The abundance of archeological evidence indicates that families would do so quite often. The luxury came at a price, however. A single can of oysters cost as much as one dollar in 1883, which would equal approximately $24.00 today.

Restaurateurs soon began to seek out the lucrative oyster profit. P.H. Gehr Restaurant and Oysters opened in Durango in 1884 followed by Joseph Thaher’s bakery, fruit, confectionary, cigars, tobacco, ice cream, and oyster parlor in 1892. None were quite as noteworthy, however, as Elitch’s Oyster House, owned and operated by the same John Elitch who later started Denver’s Elitch Gardens.

Although there was considerable profit to be made in oyster sales, customers were not always cordial, particularly if a restaurant ran out of the popular delicacy. Elitch himself recalled a precarious encounter at his restaurant on a day that every restaurant in Durango was out of oysters, and awaiting new shipments. According to Elitch, “one day a huge miner came into my restaurant and announced that he wanted fried oysters right away... My unhappy customer having just enough cargo under his belt to be unreasonable announced that either he had fried oysters or there would be a dead restaurant man.” Elitch, the ever creative entrepreneur, survived the encounter by passing fried tripe as oysters to the miner, “who swore they were the best oysters he had ever eaten.”

Evan West

Don’t forget our Crown Brand Oysters

The finest in the market.
At 45¢ per can.

From the December 30, 1899 Durango Evening Herald

The energy industry is evolving, and at La Plata Electric Association, we’re not just watching, we’re embracing the future - prudently, safely and for the benefit of our members. After all, La Plata County’s children are our members too.

970.247.5786
www.lpea.coop
Restaurant Reminiscing by LPCHS members

Back in the late 40s and 50s we had a “happy days” drive-in called the Poor Boy. Kids from the high school on 12th Street would gather there for a coke, hamburger or hot dog and lots of chatter, laughs and good times.

The same with Lucky Drive Inn, it was a good place too, but not as popular. These places are now the Pet Haus and the building kitty-corner across from North City Market. There was also the Wayside Drive Inn at 6th Avenue and 6th Street; A&W on 9th Street and Camino del Rio and the Malt Shoppe on Main and 17th.

~Joanne Brennan

Woody Wong loved children and always talked with them, not to them. He greeted every person who entered. Agriculture men always ate there; wonderful food and service. He was so good to his employees. Woolworth’s had a delicious counter. Wall Drug had a great fountain bar. High school students gathered there for lunch and after school.

~Sharon Greve

The Golden Horseshoe was the place for their Sunday Brunch — felt very grown up to accompany my parents there when I was a preteen. Loved going to the Western Steak House about 5:30 in the morning during our slumber parties, we all walked down 6th Street, ate - then had our parents pick us up to go home and sleep for the rest of the day.

~Betty (Peters) Loffer
East Meets Western

Contrary to a popular perception, there were not many Chinese who came into the San Juan/Durango area with the railroad. Most of the Chinese who came into early Durango were involved in the restaurant or laundry business. Censuses in 1880s & 90s listed Chinese residents clustered around 10th Street working in restaurants to feed hungry Durango miners and railroaders. Though there was much discrimination against the Chinese, those who came decided to stay even if they needed the sheriff’s protection.

Wong Foo, an early Chinese business entrepreneur dealing in goods and food, advertised on July 26, 1903 in the Durango Democrat;

Wong Foo, Dealer in Chinese and Japanese Fancy Goods, Chinaware and Teas. Fresh vegetables every day. Orders Promptly Delivered

Many of the Chinese were young single men who cooked and waited tables, living above the restaurants in which they worked. Restaurants varied like The Colorado Restaurant, 828 Main managed by Wong Gong (aka George Wong), The Annex Restaurant at 963 Main owned by Wong & Co. and The Horseshoe at 10th and Main managed by Wong Jew. In 1909 Wong Him was managing the El Moro (of Sheriff Thompson/ Marshal Stansel shoot-out fame). Other places like the Canton Restaurant at 945 Main or the Mandarin Cafe at 969 Main were catering to those looking for Chinese fare.

Sam Wong was typical of the Chinese who brought their culinary craft to Durango. American born, he worked in the East until deciding Durango was where he wanted to live. He traveled to Canton China to marry Yee Shee in an arranged marriage. In 1922 he bought the Mandarin Café where he had worked as a cook. In 1933 Sam was able to bring his family from China to Durango, where they lived above their restaurant. For 40 years Sam Wong’s Mandarin Café was noted for great Chinese and American Food. Sam’s son Kee Wong and his wife Suzie opened the Cathay Restaurant at 948 Main in 1964. Dinner for two at the Cathay included savory egg drop soup, followed by pork subgum, chow mein, fried jumbo shrimp, steamed rice, pineapple sweet and sour pork, tea and fortune cookies - all freshly made except the fortune cookie.

Another Durango legend was Woodrow (Woody) Wong who came from China at an early age. Woody purchased the Western Steak House at 658 Main in June 1958. It became well-known for its Chinese cuisine. Western Steak House was open 24 hours a day and Woody often worked 20 hours a day serving everything from cheeseburgers to chicken fried rice until he sold the business in 1976.

Many old timers in Durango today remember eating at the local Wong’s Chinese restaurants. My very frugal grandmother Alice Gum rarely ate out but as special treat she would take me to the Mandarin Cafe.

Gay Kiene
From the Museum Collections: Snacking on the Rails

by Susan H. Jones

Deep in the heart of museums are stored thousands of artifacts. Many of these items would have been considered commonplace when they were new. Now they are precious links to our past. Our mission is to preserve them and the stories they tell, forever. When not on exhibit, artifacts are safely packed in archival materials and stored in a state-of-the-art, climate controlled system that protects them from the damaging effects of light, dust, and fingerprints. We are now making our collections more accessible to the community by photographing and researching the artifacts and the stories of the families who used them for a user-friendly, searchable database. This work is partially funded by a Museums for America grant which is a program of the Institute of Museum and Library Services.

While working on the project, we came across several artifacts that we did not recognize and others that we didn’t realize their connections to Durango’s history. We asked the donor, Betty Loffer, about the mystery artifact pictured (right). She recognized it as a food container that belonged to her grandfather, Wayland L. Bruce, a long-time conductor on the Denver & Rio Grande (later Western) Railroad. Bruce came to Durango around the turn of the 20th century. He worked in construction and probably came to town after the Panic of 1907 looking for new business prospects. There were not many opportunities for builders in Durango at the time, so Bruce signed on with the railroad. The Denver and Rio Grande had been completed in 1882 connecting the mining camps in Silverton and the smelter in Durango with Denver. Starting as a brakeman, Bruce worked his way up to conductor on the Silverton Branch.

Betty’s grandmother would prepare Bruce’s favorite sandwiches, ground beef and pickles, and put them in the container. Salt and pepper were put in the screw-top sections. W.L. would put the container in the drinking water tank that was mounted on the wall in the caboose on a mixed-consist train. The drinking water containers were filled with ice which melted to provide drinking water for the train crews and kept the sandwiches cold. Even though the train carried freight and passengers, food service onboard was minimal.

When Betty was a young girl, her grandfather would say to her in the mornings, “Wanna go to Silverton?” She loved to go with him and ride in the cupola of the caboose. She remembers how “Old Henry”, another member of the train crew, would come by when he wasn’t occupied with other duties on the train and hold her so she could swing her legs back and forth. Betty developed a love of the railroad, especially the line between Durango and Silverton. When she was in high school in the 1950s, Betty was thrilled when her father got her a job as part of the “Coke crew” on the train. Joe “Kinky” Peters was the manager of the Durango Coca Cola Bottling Plant which had the contract for providing refreshments for the three and a half hour journey to Silverton. Betty has also donated some other artifacts from her father’s association with this iconic American brand (upper right).

“In those days,” remembers Betty, “the railroad wanted people to stay in their seats so they didn’t fall off the train!” Betty and her co-worker would walk up and down the aisles selling Coca Cola, candy, and Cracker Jacks. She became proficient at pouring Coke into a cup on the moving train without spilling a drop. They also sold information pamphlets to passengers on board. While it was a great experience for the Coke crews to work onboard, it was also hard work. Two teenagers served all of the passengers each day and took care of inventory. Being a member of the Coke crew in the summer became a rite of passage for Durango youth including the Historical Society’s own Robert McDaniel and Charles DiFerdinando. The onboard concessions on the D&SNGRR have grown considerably. Today two crew members staff the concession car which includes a full bar as well as Coke products, snacks, and souvenirs for passengers brave enough to tackle the swaying journey from their seats. Passengers in premium cars have dedicated attendants that serve hot and cold beverages and snacks.

At the Animas Museum, we are preserving even simple artifacts like these and their connections to the people who built Durango and La Plata County so that future generations can learn and appreciate their stories.

Susan H. Jones is an Animas Museum volunteer and a historic interpreter on the Durango & Silverton Railroad. She has been known to enjoy a Toffee-Coffee on the train.
Food for Thought by Charles A. DiFerdinando

Early settlers coming into the area had to bring a grubstake of staple foodstuffs with them. When settlements were established, merchants followed. They opened stores to supply necessities but usually at very high prices because of the high freight costs. It wasn’t long until entrepreneurs realized they could make more money as merchants or farmers supplying food. The lower Animas Valley began to be settled by farmers and ranchers who saw a ready market for their products in the mountain mining communities. The early merchants usually had general merchandise stores that not only sold staple foods, but general merchandise needed by settlers. Those early stores also provided other services such as postal service and banking and were community gathering places.

When Animas City was established in 1876, George Kephart established George Kephart & Co., a branch for Thatcher and Co. of Pueblo, Colorado. Kephart sold general merchandise, groceries and provided banking through his branch of Thatcher & Co. The concept of bank branches in grocery stores is not a new one. Many early settlers traveled once or twice a year to Del Norte or other towns on the eastern slope to obtain supplies of staple foods such as flour, sugar and salted meats. Those in the lower Animas Valley sometimes went southeast to Tierra Amarilla, New Mexico to get supplies. Either trip was long and difficult. The trip to New Mexico was challenging with six river crossings. Early pioneer Robert Dwyer made a fall trip to Tierra Amarilla with six pack burros to get winter supplies and lost most of his supplies on the return trip while making a river crossing after heavy rains.

The new town of Durango was established in the fall of 1880 and by November boasted two bakeries and two meat markets. By March of 1881 it had six General Merchants, one being George Kephart and Company who moved from Animas City to the new town of Durango. His move to the new town was complicated by needing to move a large safe that was used for assets of the bank branch in his store. The safe was moved to the new store the first day while the Animas City store was kept open. At the close of business that day the clerk had $1800 in receipts, with no safe to secure them. He was instructed to bring the money to the new store in Durango at the close of business. He was nervous about the trip because of a lawless gang of New Mexico cowboys in the area who he feared would rob him on the two mile trip to Durango. He asked Charlie Pinkerton, a young cowboy and the son of Judge Pinkerton, an early homesteader in the Animas Valley, to put the bag with the cash under his chaps and ride with him to Durango. Charlie and the clerk did encounter the New Mexico gang and while they detained the clerk, Charlie continued towards Durango with the cash and got it there safely. The clerk was not harmed and the gang was thwarted in their robbery attempt.

In 1887 Durango newspapers featured ads for fancy and specialty grocery items that were available because of the improved transportation provided by the railroads. Stores offered fresh oysters in season, fancy fruits and citrus that couldn’t be grown locally, California honey, fresh fish, preserves, jams, jellies and pickles. City Market offered “The choicest meats in the City, fresh oysters, celery, and butter”.

Charles A. DiFerdinando is a local historian and a member of the La Plata County Historical Society Board of Directors.

The 1892 City Directory for Durango lists almost 20 different outlets for grocery, meats, produce and bakery products. These ranged from small neighborhood markets to the large wholesale and retail mercantiles such as Schutt Mercantile and Graden Mercantile. By 1900 Durango was recovering and growing after the depression of the 1893 silver crash.

The 1920s ushered in more changes for the grocery business in Durango with the coming of chain, franchise grocery stores. The Durango Evening Herald of September 2, 1927 had a large ad for Piggly Wiggly Grocery with “Prices to fit your budget.” Many smaller stores closed because they could not compete with the chain stores. In the 1930s Safeway was the first modern self-serve grocery chain to open in Durango. They built a new building at 11th and Main Avenue which featured a parking lot. That building still stands at 11th and Main Avenue with its signature yellow and black tile skirting on the front façade. As Durango continued to grow, Safeway built a large store on north Main Avenue in the early 1950s at 2300 block (high school parking lot). Also in the early 1950s the Prinster family of Grand Junction, founders of the City Market Grocery chain, purchased the Charles Naeglin property at 14th Street and Main Avenue and built the first “City Market Grocery” in Durango. There had been a City Market in Durango in the 1880s and a City Market in Animas City in the 1930s-40s operated by Violet Smith. With the arrival of the chain stores featuring parking lots and lower prices, the smaller family stores began to close. One of the last neighborhood stores to close was the Wegher Grocery at 5th Avenue and 6th Street (now College). With the boom of the late 1950s and early 60s Town Plaza Shopping Center was built and included a second Safeway location, in the store now occupied by Rite-Aid drugstore.

The local food movement brings the story full circle with people wanting to know where their food comes from, having it as fresh as possible and produced locally. Shopping at the farmer's market and small local producers, residents can get a feel for what grocery shopping and eating seasonally was like in the early years.
Insights from the Past for Our Local Food Future
by Jim Dyer

The local food movement's ties to the past are obvious but often overlooked. As we see the growing interest in knowing more about our food, where it comes from, who produced it, and how, two underlying desires are often evident; a desire for food to come from the local area and a desire to return to the "foodways" of our past. Local food allows us to know the farmer or rancher and their methods and have confidence that the food is produced in ways that are consistent with our values - ideally healthy, green, fair, and affordable.

Looking back to the old ways is often criticized as overly sentimental and shallow thinking. But since food is, at its best, rooted in culture, we shouldn't be so dismissive of a desire to reestablish some of the relationships to food that served us so well in the past. A reading of Michael Pollan's insightful books reveals how useful it is to remember how we ate in the past, especially skipping back at least two generations - before the desire for convenience, cheapness, and consistency fed into the waiting arms and pocketbooks of slick marketers and food corporations. Pollan has said, "Don't eat anything your great-grandmother wouldn't recognize as food."

So what did our food system look like in La Plata County's past? By chance, in the CSU library some years past, I stumbled upon the agricultural census for La Plata County for the year of 1945. I was looking for a time in our past when things looked much different than now, and I found it. Of the 936 farms (actually not much different than today), over 30% of them reported growing apples, nearly 20% grew potatoes, 730 of those farms had milk cows, over 80% had chickens, and nearly 75% raised vegetables for home use. No doubt, the war effort had focused our energies on production, but those statistics stand in sharp contrast to today in La Plata County.

Not surprisingly, a 1945 snapshot of our past bears quite a resemblance to what people want now in their local food system - healthy, diverse farms and ranches, greater community self-sufficiency, and a vibrant, local agricultural economy. Luckily, more and more consumers here are looking for local products and are willing to seek them out and pay a fair price to keep the producers in business.

A better public understanding of our past local agriculture and food system would be instructive and very interesting. How did farmers and ranchers make ends meet, how much did people rely on their own gardens and how did the mining towns get their food supplies?

As we look to our future in La Plata County, we face some significant obstacles - not the least of which is drought, extreme weather, and climate changes which are already being felt in this region. How did early growers and communities, from the recent past back into prehistory, build resilience into their food systems? How did they adapt their growing methods and their crops and diets to the changes they faced? The more we see what worked and what didn't in the past, the better we can develop the local food systems that will serve us well into the future.

Jim Dyer is Director of Healthy Community Food Systems, dedicated to healthy land, health food, and healthy people.

Clara Strohm Mead (center) and her sister Eva Strohm (right) ca. 1902 preserve the bounty of Hermosa for the family to use in the winter. Delicious locally raised food is as important now as it was then. Photo courtesy Animas Museum Photo Archives, Ed Mead Collection.
From Native Americans to miners, ranchers and settlers to tourists, our San Juan Mountains have lured people here for centuries. Recognizing a need for local involvement with one of our most treasured resources, a group of local citizens responded to a request in 1988 by the Supervisor of the San Juan National Forest to bridge a gap between the federal government and the community. The San Juan Mountains Association (SJMA) was born. The largest wilderness area in the state of Colorado is within the forest’s nearly two million acres. The Wilderness Act of 1964 defined wilderness as “an area of undeveloped Federal land retaining its primeval character and influence without permanent improvements or human habitation.”

From the association’s inception their mission statement has essentially remained unchanged: “to promote responsible care of natural and cultural resources through education and hands-on-involvement that inspires respect and reverence for our lands.” They operate under a participating agreement with the San Juan National Forest, the BLM Tres Rios Resource Area and Canyon of the Ancients, an outreach which also encompasses the Uncompaghre and Rio Grande National Forests.

SJMA interfaces with the public through its Cultural, Educational Outreach, Volunteer Program and Visitor Information Services, as well as its bookstore operations. Executive Director Susan Bryson wears many hats, but credits her highly motivated staff, eight full-time, two part-time and four seasonal employees with the success of SJMA’s wide reaching goals.

Ruth Lambert, PhD, directs the SJMA’s Cultural Programs which are largely supported by grants. One component, the Cultural Site Stewardship Program (CSSP), builds on a 2000 pilot grant. Past projects have resulted in a 2011 study of rural cemeteries, the Pioneers, Prospectors, and Trout exhibit and a children’s archeology camp, both held at the Animas Museum.

The CSSP trains volunteers to monitor the condition of pre-European and historic archaeological sites. Additional grants from the State Historical Fund, the BLM and the Forest Service have enabled further protection, mapping and photo documentation of sites over the years. Selected as a model for the 2008 national Preserve America Steward Program, the SJMA stewardship program was recognized by First Lady Laura Bush at the White House with Lambert and Bryson in attendance. The CSSP received one of the first awards in the national program. Also in 2008, the Colorado Historical Society awarded the program the prestigious Stephen H. Hart award for preservation education. Today the CSSP continues to monitor important sites in the San Juan Mountain National Forest.

Closer to home, Volunteer Program Director Kathe Hayes’ impressive expansion of SJMA’s volunteer force received recognition. In 2006 Ms. Hayes won the Land Stewardship Award from the Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado located in Denver. Hayes’ projects include the Leave No Trace, Tread Lightly and the Wilderness Information Specialist Program. Wilderness ethics, and all that encompasses, play a major role in our experience of forest areas. Visitors and locals of all ages use the vast network of San Juan Forest trails. Volunteers provide invaluable aid repairing and maintaining these pathways, reclaiming illegal trails and providing trail information.

Yet another project, an assessment and documentation of thirteen small rural cemeteries in La Plata County is underway. This project is assembling historical and burial records for the cemeteries and will result in a report and a searchable on-line database. The SJMA is partnering with Fort Lewis College’s public history program, directed by Andrew Gulliford, PhD. Student interns and volunteers are assisting with historical research and field documentation.

(continued next page)
As John Muir noted, unadulterated joy in forest areas does not mean we dispense with civilization entirely. Alan Peterson, director of visitor and bookstore services works on the front lines, issuing public lands permits and providing visitor information at San Juan Public Lands Center. Peterson assists in overseeing thirteen interpretive bookstore outlets throughout the SJNF, Uncompaghre, and Rio Grande National Forests. Sales of posters, pins, maps and guidebooks bring in much needed financial support to SJMA.

An ongoing study of aspen tree carvings draws on over 1000 of these arboreglyphs recorded along the Pine-Piedra Stock Driveway. This study resulted in Lambert's book, The Wooden Canvas, which explores the history of early Hispanic herding activities in our area. To date this project has included four public field trips to visit the arboreglyphs, one season of archaeological field documentation, four community presentations, two museum exhibits, a photographic exhibit, as well as the book. As the educational activities provided by SJMA evolve, they are changing the way the community relates to San Juan Mountains.

Conservation and education go hand in hand. Gabi Morey, SJMA's Education Director, conducted SJMA's third Forests to Faucets Teacher Workshop in 2014, in partnership with the Mountain Studies Institute and the Water Information Program. Morey's workshops for children cover the gamut on water and its issues, from learning about fish, fishing and our local macroinvertebrates to studying the watershed area systems that integrate these resources. SJMA also targets the next generation through field seminars and nature hikes, helping them understand the continued relevance of our public lands.

It remains a challenge to manage a wilderness unobtrusively, lest the resource be “loved to death.” No organization better meets this challenge than the SJMA. In recognition of the numerous projects accomplished in partnership with the LPCHS, for its conservation and preservation efforts and dedication to education, and for enriching the lives of all of us who appreciate and wish to preserve our unique mountain public lands' areas, it is an honor for the La Plata County Historical Society to present its annual Heritage Award to the association.

Marilee Jantzer White PhD is a member of the La Plata County Historical Society Board of Directors.
The Remembered Song: A Love Story

by Bruce Spining

Fifty years ago in the movie the Sound of Music, Captain von Trapp touches the hearts of his audience by telling them he wishes to sing for them a love song - one he hopes they will never forget. He sings “Edelweiss” which speaks to Austrian values. His deep emotional response to the looming occupation of his homeland requires the help of his family and the audience to complete the song.

This year’s heritage award is also a love story with many of these same elements. It is the story of two remarkable people who share a passion for our heritage and also a love for each other. These passions have found expression in how this couple - both individually and together - have served to preserve and expand our vision of our own local history.

Robert McDaniel and Jill Seyfarth have been singing a duet about the value of knowing and preserving our past since the early 1980s - and their song has touched our understanding as deeply as von Trapp’s song. But we are getting ahead of our story and as historians, our honorees would hate that.

So let’s go back to the beginning, to a February day in 1984, when a ski patrol guy spotted an attractive young woman approaching Lift 5 at Purgatory ski area. He managed to get on the lift at the same time. That ski patrol guy turned out to be Robert McDaniel, the new Director of the Animas Museum. The girl was Jill Seyfarth, a Colgate educated archaeologist who had been doing work at the Salmon Ruins near Bloomfield, New Mexico. What Jill and Robert learned in those first few minutes was that they shared a passion for history and understanding how the past actually frames and impacts the future. That initial conversation has extended for more than 30 years.

As the Director of the Animas Museum, Robert would spend the next 31 years creating an organization and a community institution. McDaniel, a Durango native from an old area family, had returned to the community having recently completed his Masters degree in history from the University of Utah. He had arrived at a time when the community was engaged in embracing its past. The 1976 Centennial/Bicentennial had kicked off an interest in history, and Durango’s own centennial celebrations in 1980-81 created an added level of interest for a community wishing to understand its own past.

At the same time, Jill was also becoming an active contributor to historic preservation. Her archaeological background suited her well to working with communities to preserve important structures and locales. Initially, she used these skills working for the La Plata County Planning Office, but eventually she found a long-term niche as the City of Durango’s cultural and historical preservation expert. In that role, Seyfarth, became an expert and also a kind of lightning rod for community historic preservation. On her watch, the city developed a Historic Preservation Board that served as a citizen advisory group on issues related to public planning and preservation of historic sites and buildings. That board was an integral part of the effort to ensure that the underlying and historic character of our town would be sustainable. Jill also oversaw an inventory of all of the historic properties within Durango’s original townsite.

Jill and Robert shared in the city’s historic preservation efforts - with Robert as a charter member of the community board and Jill as the City Planner. Together, this would be one of several projects where the couple would be direct collaborators.

In Robert’s journey, early efforts had led to the creation of a La Plata County Historical Society, which became a recognized non-profit entity in 1974. Robert joined the group as a member then Board member and ultimately its Museum Director. He helped transform it from a group with good intentions into a proactive community organization.

Robert and the LPCHS rescued the historical Animas School from probable demolition when the 9-R School Board agreed to donate the building for use as a museum. Robert led the Museum from one endeavour to another - window restorations; classroom and facilities renovations; grounds and landscaping projects; and many, many exhibits, events, and activities. Many of those projects were funded by the Colorado State Historical Fund. However all of them were supported by generous donations from local groups and people who were watching the transformation of the old Animas School into an important local resource. The process would culminate with the restoration of the building’s historic hip roof structure, which earned the Colorado Historical Society’s 2008 Governor’s Award, the state’s highest historic preservation honor.

During all of these projects, the Animas Museum would continually expand and diversify its collections from a handful of items to an assembly of over 35,000 artifacts, photographs, and archives that have significance for the people of La Plata County and beyond.

Despite the voices clamouring for demolition, Jill moved forward and wrote a grant application to the State Historical Fund for money to conduct site stabilization and the environmental mitigations needed to at least make the building more safe and accessible for future development. Like a true visionary who sees opportunities where others see problems, Jill understood that an old structure was actually a way to create a new resource. She knew - as did Robert at the former Animas School - that an old thing rescued and preserved serves as a link to our past and a bridge to the future. This initial grant would set in motion a series of additional projects that would transform an old and decaying structure into a new community resource, the Powerhouse Science Center.

What Jill and Robert saw in the historic structures they managed to preserve and reinvent was a kind of “message in a bottle,” providing the tangible links for us to “hear” and understand the people of our past. This begins a new conversation about using the past to help shape our future. This year’s honorees did more than fix up old buildings. They created them as spaces where our community can learn, grow, and reimagine itself.

As the Captain von Trapp character noted about his beloved Austrian song, “I know you share this love. I pray that you will never let it die.”

Bruce Spining is a member of the La Plata County Historical Society Board of Directors.
Community Heritage Awards

The La Plata County Historical Society initiated the Community Heritage Award in 2006 to recognize key institutions, organizations, groups and individuals who have made important contributions to preserving and promoting our area's heritage and traditions. The Community Heritage Award seeks to demonstrate that our heritage is a living thing. It is expressed in the ongoing lives of people, businesses and institutions that both embrace our shared past and engage us in our shared futures. Recipients embody much more than the legacies of past traditions. They represent living, evolving traditions that people who are new to our community can come to know and that old timers recognize and can celebrate. The 2015 Community Heritage Awards recipients, the San Juan Mountains Association and Robert McDaniel & Jill Seyfarth, will be honored at a festive celebration on Thursday, May 21 at the Durango BPOE #507 Lodge (901 E. 2nd Ave). Doors will open at 5:30. Enjoy a cocktail and bid at the silent auction featuring delicious items sure to appeal to gourmets, foodies and dessert enthusiasts. After a buffet dinner prepared by Hot Tomatoes and a special musical performance, the awards will be presented. Seating is limited, so don’t delay. Tickets are $40 and may be purchased at the Museum or by phone at 259-2402. Thank you to our generous sponsors; Durango and Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad, First National Bank of Durango, La Plata Electric Association, Maria’s Bookshop, Purgatory and Southwest Colorado Federal Credit Union.

Sweet History

The building that houses the Animas Museum originally served as the school for Animas City. Generations of children studied, played and ate lunches at school while legions of parents hosted class parties, fundraisers and community events. Cookies were no doubt important to all of those activities. To honor that culinary heritage the La Plata County Historical Society has published The Animas City Cookie Book including historic cookie recipes, images and stories. The book can be purchased at the Museum Store.

At the Museum

History is always on the menu at the Animas Museum. Our exhibits tell the stories of who we are and how we came to be here. Wish You Were Here serves as a broad history of the area through the stories of travel, while Forged by Flame explores how fire shaped our community. Law & Disorder tells the stories of local outlaws and the brave lawmen that brought order to the county. Explore area archaeology, functional yet beautiful Ute beadwork, Navajo weavings and treasures from pueblo cultures. The Museum’s 1905 classroom brings turn-of-the-century education to life while the 1870s Joy Cabin stands in contrast to modern conveniences (and comfort). Later this year we will help celebrate Purgatory’s 50th Anniversary with a special exhibit and programming.

On Saturday, September 12 we will celebrate Animas City Day with a walking tour of this historic area as well as welcoming the alumni of the Animas City School for their annual reunion. During the Cowboy Poetry Gathering on Saturday, October 3, actors portraying some of the area’s early pioneers and ranchers will be at the Museum to share their stories. As part of the Durango Heritage Celebration the Museum will host a Wool Market on Saturday, October 10 featuring spinners, fiber artists and all things wool (including sheep). We will have a special exhibit and presentation highlighting the arborglyph art of Hispano herders. The holiday season gets underway with our annual Old-Fashioned Christmas Bazaar on Saturday, December 5 including a sneak peek on Friday evening. Continue the holiday spirit with a Victorian Tea on Saturday, December 12th.

Events are always being added to our calendar so check our website, www.animasmuseum.org or follow us on Facebook for the very latest listings.

The Museum, located at 3065 W. 2nd Avenue is open 10-5 Monday-Saturday (May through October) and 10-4 Tuesday-Saturday (November through April). For more information call 970-259-2402.

See you at the Museum!
Heritage
It's about Tradition and History.
It's about honoring and preserving our past as we look to the future.

To Robert McDaniel & Jill Seyfarth and the San Juan Mountains Association, it’s a tradition of quality, integrity and commitment to family and our community.

We not only congratulate this year’s recipients of the Heritage Award, we sincerely thank them for their contributions in preserving the heritage of La Plata County.

INVESTING IN OUR COMMUNITY SINCE 1882
259 W. 9th St, Durango - 351 Bayfield Center Dr, Bayfield - Walmart - Albertsons - Boco

Proud to be Part of the Community
Since 1921

Kroegers
Town Plaza • Durango
970-247-0660 • www.kroegers.com

Friends of the Animus Museum
Alan L. Sabo
Amy Ginn and Tom Westwater
Barbara and Greg Martin
Brako-Settles Family
Bruce D. Spining
Carroll and Maxine Peterson
Charles A. DiFerdinando
Cheryl Bryant
Cheryle Brandsma
Diane L. Skinner
Dick White and Faye Schrater
Gary and Kathy Gibson
Gregory and Susan Stilwell
Janet and Chuck Williams
Jeff Johnson
Jill Seyfarth and Robert McDaniel
Jim and Bernice Bowra
Joyce Erickson
Kathy McKenzie
Kathy Szelag
Lee and Sandy Campbell
Les Goldman
Lisa Mackey Photography
Louis and Gay Kiene
Marilee Jantzer-White
Marilyn Barnhart
Mary Jane Hood and Family
Nancy and Derrill Macho
Nancy Yeager Rice and Heidi L. White
Pat Garofalo
Paul Wilson
Paula Wiseman
Rae P. Haynes
Ray and Carol Schmudde
Suzanne Murray
The Telluride Iron Works Co.
W. Clark and Caroline Kinser
Mike Francis

Everyone has a unique story.
Southwest Colorado Genealogical Society can help you discover yours!

www.swcogen.org

A Publication of the La Plata County Historical Society
“Thank you for doing this!” was the message from one of our members after an event where we brought to life some of the stories of local history. As much as we loved receiving thanks, we must also thank those who help us by supporting the La Plata County Historical Society. The historical society receives no government support, relying on memberships and the generous donations from the community to survive. By joining the society your membership dues support the Animas Museum and help provide the entertaining and educational programming we offer, often at no charge to the public. If you are already a member, please consider upgrading your membership.

We also invite you to volunteer. Whether you volunteer on a long-term basis or for the occasional project, we need your help to fulfill our mission to keep La Plata County history and culture alive for present and future generations.

Supporting History

Use the form below to join the historical society and call the Museum at 259-2402 for more information about volunteering. You may also join online by visiting our website at www.animasmuseum.org

La Plata County Historical Society Membership Form

New Member_____ Renewal_____ Gift Membership_____ (Gift From______________________)

Basic Membership:
Basic members receive free admission to the Museum, a quarterly newsletter and two guest passes to share with friends/family.

Single $35
Family $50
Pioneer (individual over 65) $25
Student (w/ ID) $15

Enhanced Membership:
Enhanced members receive free admission to the Museum, a quarterly newsletter, a 10% discount in museum store, special invitation to events and four guest passes to share with friends/family.

Single $45
Family $60
Pioneer (individual over 65) $30
Centennial $125

Business Membership:
Small Business (5 or fewer employees) $150
Medium Business (6-11 employees) $200
Corporate (12 or more employees) $250

Enhanced membership benefits apply.

Ask for information about becoming a Lifetime member!

Name__________________________________________________________

Address_______________________________________________________

City_____________ State_____ Zip Code__________

Phone (____ ) ________________

Email__________________________________________________________

☐ Hardcopy Newsletter ☐ Electronic Newsletter

I would like to make an additional donation of $_______

In memory of: ____________________________
or to the:

General Fund $_______ Building Fund $_______
Collections Care Fund $_______
Endowment Fund ($500 min) $_______

Please make checks payable to LPCHS and send with this form to:

LPCHS P.O. Box 3384 Durango CO 81302
Visit the museum online at www.animasmuseum.org