

HONORING A PIONEER PALEONTOLOGIST

Category: Hub Articles

Published: Wednesday, 25 May 2016 19:42

Written by dave

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THE GAZETTE

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Thursday, February 26, 2009

HONORING A PIONEER

PALEONTOLOGIST

Celebrating Charlotte Hill's 160th Birthday

BY DAVE HUGHES
YOUR HUB CONTRIBUTOR

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One would think a young woman who married at 13 years old in the earliest days of Colorado City — 1863 — just three years after the frontier town was founded, and bore seven children, one of whom died in infancy, two others later, would not have had much time for being anything more than a home-maker for her carpenter husband Adam Hill and family. They lived continuously in Colorado City into the early 1870s. Then were back in the 1880s into the '90s. But Charlotte Hill was an amazing woman whose 160th birthday was just observed on February 15, 2009 in the small community of Florissant, some 40 miles west of “Old” Colorado City. For Charlotte Hill is now, belatedly, being recognized and honored as the prime mover in getting the rich Florissant Fossil Beds recognized, studied, leading to it being eventually designated a National Monument in 1969.

For Charlotte was a budding, self-taught amateur paleontologist from Colorado City of all places! Instead of just looking for crystals and semi-precious stones that many rock-hounds and geologists look for in the mountains, she looked for and found fossilized million-year-old plants, insects, and other ancient critters. She is given credit in scientific literature for some of her findings with entries like this: “1878: Charlotte Hill collects a well-preserved fossil butterfly, later named *Prodryas persephone*, from I am told by Dr Herb Meyer, the Fossil Beds Paleontologist who has spent years creating a database of all her known specimens, that there are at least 169 in formal collections.

Now how did the Old Colorado City Historical Society, get involved with or even learn about her story? Much less help her Hill and Coplan (Charlotte's family name) descendants figure out just where she, her husband, and other relatives lived in or around Colorado City before they took advantage of the 1862 Homestead Act and homesteaded near Florissant in 1869. And moved there in the early 1870s. Well, in anticipation of the entire Hill, Coplan, Nickell families (13

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individuals) traveling to Colorado from diverse places in California, to attend the celebration in Florissant one family member, Patty Shepherd, found our Web site because, of course, when she put the reference "Colorado City" from family records into Google, she discovered our Historical Society Web site: [http:// historyoldcolo.com](http://historyoldcolo.com). And we, being very responsive helping people, find locations in or around early El Paso County (and Teller County and thus Florissant was part of El Paso County way back then) related to their forebearers, tracked down where Charlotte and Adam lived, where they had a "rooming house" for a time, and even where the great great grandfather of the Nickell branch.

Eight members of the Hill family who came to attend the Celebration of Charlotte's 160th birthday at the Florissant National Monument. The log building she lived in was razed in 1959 to make room for a modern building. But Lorene Englert saved the logs, and we have three of them — guaranteed to be from 1859 and that log building — at the History Society!

So when eight of the 13 family members came to our History Center the day before the Florissant all-day celebration, I showed them on large maps and early city photographs where their kin had been long ago. I also photographed them standing in front of one of those 150-year—old logs that came out of the building their Charlotte Hill lived in. I also discovered something that none of the family (who obviously had done extensive genealogical work from family documents) nor the National Park Service agents knew. Charlotte Hill had — a museum in Colorado City! I wager it displayed specimens she brought down from the Fossil Beds, 40 miles away by horseback or carriage. No trains to or through Florissant existed for four more years!

Amazing. Colorado City was too SMALL to have a museum. Right? Of course in the breezy early "directories" you seldom found addresses, so we don't know what building the museum was in exactly. Just between, by that time, four Old Town saloons, one hotel and horse barns. Charlotte Hill was a real Colorado City pioneer. I want to be sure she is recognized as such.

So there was a grand time held by all up the pass Sunday, February 15, 2009 honoring an accomplished lady from 160 years ago.

She was most responsible for putting the Florissant Fossil Beds on the national scientific map.

Florissant Scientific Society Events —Welcoming Reception

* Hors D'oeuvres

Superintendent, Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument (Keith Payne)

President, Pikes Peak Historical Society (Celinda Kaelin)

Representative for the Florissant Scientific Society (Tim Brown)

Vice President, The Friends of the Florissant Fossil Beds (Sally Maertens)

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Speaker Herb Meyer - The homesteader who made the difference: Charlotte Hill's role in unveiling Florissant's place in world fame '

Steven Veatch - Charlotte Hill and the Princeton Scientific Expedition of 1877

A Field Trip to overlook the site of the Hill Homestead February 15, 2009, 11:30 a.m. to 4 pm.
Florissant Library Reception Hall

A lot of researchers, such as Dr. Beth Simmons, did a lot of work researching, not only the work that Charlotte did at the Fossil Beds, but also the family lineages of the Coplens back to 1700s. All in preparation for the celebration, but also for the continuation of the historical and scientific record.

We in the Old Colorado City Historical Society will be pleased to have copies of those, and we will exhibit them at our center. Delightfully, several of the Hill and Nickell family have decided to join the Old Colorado City Historical Society.

The Florissant Formation in of the family had a Colorado staff apparently knew.

David Atkins from afar wrote about Charlotte Hill and her successful research on their 35 million years old site"

The Colorado City "Business Directory" for "Homesteaders,

Her found Fossils, had an influence on paleontologist

At least three specimens (most are at the Smithsonian, Yale, and Harvard) have her name attached: But the real zinger is that the address they had where they operated a rooming house', 10 years before her name surfaces in an 1894 directory,

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IMAGE PROVIDED BY DAVE HUGHES

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YOUR HISTORY

HONORING A PIONEER PALEONTOLOGIST

Celebrating Charlotte Hill's 160th birthday

BY DAVE HUGHES
YOURHUB CONTRIBUTOR
STORY ID: 580825



Dave Hughes: Is a west-side resident and Internet pioneer.

One would think a young woman who married at 13 years old in the earliest days of Colorado City — 1863 — just three years after the frontier town was founded, and bore seven children, one of whom died in infancy, two others later, would not have had much time for being anything more than a homemaker for her carpenter husband Adam Hill and family. They lived continuously in Colorado City into the early 1870s. Then were back in the 1880s into the '90s.

But Charlotte Hill was an amazing woman whose 160th birthday was just observed on February 15, 2009 in the small community of Florissant, some 40 miles west of "Old" Colorado City. For Charlotte Hill is now, belatedly, being recognized and honored as the prime mover in getting the rich Florissant Fossil Beds recognized, studied, leading to it being eventually designated a National Monument in 1969. For Charlotte was a budding, self-taught amateur paleontologist from Colorado City of all places!

Instead of just looking for crystals and semi-precious stones that many rock-hounds and geologists look for in the mountains, she looked for and found fossilized million-year-old plants, insects, and other ancient critters. She is given credit in scientific literature for some of her findings with entries like this:

"1878: Charlotte Hill collects a well-preserved fossil butterfly, later named *Prodryas persephone*, from the Florissant Formation in Colorado. The fossil is about 35 million years old."

And at least three specimens (most are at the Smithsonian, Yale, and Harvard) have her name attached: *Ulmus Hilliae*, an elm; *Rhush Hilliae*, a sumac; and the best one of all is *Rosa Hilliae*, a rose — all millions of years old.

I am told by Dr Herb Meyer, the Fossil Beds Paleontologist who has spent years creating a database of all her known specimens, that there are at least 169 in formal collections.

Now how did the Old Colorado City Historical Society get involved with or even learn about her story? Much less help her Hill and Coplan (Charlotte's family name) descendants figure out just where she, her husband, and other relatives lived in or around Colorado City before they took advantage of the 1862 Homestead Act and homesteaded near Florissant in 1869. And moved there in the early 1870s.

Well, in anticipation of the entire Hill, Coplan, Nickell families (13 individuals) traveling to Colorado from diverse places in California, to attend the celebration in Florissant one family member, Patty Shepherd, found our Web site because, of course, when she put the reference "Colorado City" from family records into Google, she discovered our Historical Society Web site: <http://history.oldcolo.com>. And we, being very responsive helping people, find locations in or around early El Paso County (and Teller County and thus Florissant was part of El Paso County way back then) related to their forebears, tracked down where Charlotte and Adam lived, where they had a "rooming house" for a time, and even where the great grand-father of the Nickell branch of the family had a Colorado City hotel (Mather House) and purportedly a saloon!

But the real zinger is that the address they had where they operated a rooming house corresponded perfectly with the long 1859 Gerish and Cobb log building which was at 710 Colorado Avenue — 2700 block today. And which log build-



CHARLOTTE HILL FAMILY AND LOG

Eight members of the Hill family who came to attend the Celebration of Charlotte's 160th birthday at the Florissant National

Monument last week. She was most responsible for putting the Florissant Fossil Beds on the national scientific map.

ing was razed in 1959 to make room for a modern building, but Lorene Englert saved the logs, and we have three of them — guaranteed to be from 1859 and that log building — at the History Society!

So when eight of the 13 family members came to our History Center the day before the Florissant all-day celebration, I showed them on large maps and early city photographs where their kin had been long ago. I also photographed them standing in front of one of those 150-year-old logs that came out of the building their Charlotte Hill lived in.

I also discovered something that none of the family (who obviously had done extensive genealogical work from family documents) nor the National Park Service staff apparently knew.

In a tiny Colorado City "Business Directory" for 1884, 10 years before her name surfaces in an 1894 directory, I found the following unmistakable line: "Hill, Charlotte - Museum." Colorado City only had 250 inhabitants in 1884, there were only 14 "businesses" listed (four of them saloons),

and yet Charlotte Hill had a museum there! I'll wager it displayed specimens she brought down from the Fossil Beds, 40 miles away by horseback or carriage. No trains to or through Florissant for four more years! Amazing. Colorado City was too SMALL to have a museum. Right? Of course in the breezy early "directories" you seldom found addresses, so we don't know what building it was in exactly. Just between, by that time, four Old Town saloons, one hotel and horse barns.

Charlotte Hill was a real Colorado City pioneer. I want to be sure she is recognized as such.

So there was a grand time held by all up the pass Sunday, February 15, 2009 honoring an accomplished lady from 160 years ago.

This was the Sunday Program: "Homesteaders, Fossils, and Scientists: A Tribute to Charlotte Hill on Her 160th Birthday"

Sponsored by
-National Park Service
-The Friends of the Florissant Fossil Beds
-Pikes Peak Historical Society

-Florissant Scientific Society
Events

-Welcoming Reception
• Hors D'oeuvres
• Superintendent, Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument (Keith Payne)

• President, Pikes Peak Historical Society (Celinda Kaelin)

• Representative for the Florissant Scientific Society (Tim Brown)

• Vice President, The Friends of the Florissant Fossil Beds (Sally Maertens)

-Speaker Herb Meyer

-The homesteader who made the difference: Charlotte Hill's role in unveiling Florissant's place in world fame

• Steven Veatch
- Charlotte Hill and the Princeton Scientific Expedition of 1877

• David Atkins
- Charlotte Hill and her influence on paleontologist Samuel H. Scudder

• Beth Simmons
- Passing the heritage to brother John Coplen: The Coplen Petrified Forest

• Comments from the Hill Family

-Reception and Celebration



PRINCETON UNIVERSITY
The *Prodryas persephone*, 35-million-year-old butterfly found by Charlotte Hill in the Florissant Fossil Beds in 1878.



IMAGE PROVIDED BY DAVE HUGHES
Charlotte Hill, improbable amateur paleontologist who was married in Colorado City in 1863.

• Cake and unveiling of new wayside exhibit
- Field Trip to overlook the site of the Hill Homestead
February 15, 2009, 11:30 a.m. to 4 p.m.
Florissant Library Reception Hall

A lot of researchers, such as Dr. Beth Simmons, did a lot of work researching, not only the work that Charlotte did at the Fossil Beds, but also the family lineages of the Coplen's back into the 1700s. All in preparation for the celebration, but also for the continuation of the historical and scientific record. We in the Old Colorado City Historical Society will be pleased to have copies of those, and we will exhibit them at our center AND online indefinitely.

Delightfully, several of the Hill and Nickell family have decided to join the Old Colorado City Historical Society from afar because of our successful research on their behalf and finding things nobody knew about this amazing woman.

Next week I will write about her equally amazing brother, John David Coplen and his achievements in totally other ways. Another unknown pioneer from Colorado.