

## Old Colorado City Historical Society (2)

Category: Old Colorado City Historical Society (1992 - 2010)

Published: Friday, 02 December 2011 10:25

Written by dave

Hits: 6002

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### ***When the Society Almost Ran a Beer Hall***

As the Society grew in membership and its Treasury increased, in 1991 I agreed to serve as Board Treasurer - after two other Board members had a turn as Treasurer and had a hard time keeping up by doing our books manually. I immediately started using a computerized spread sheet which tracked the budget as well as our overall fiscal situation with little effort, which the entire Board was able to read and follow at every board meeting.

After all the Society was running at least three fund raising events - a Bancroft Park Craft Show, a Cemetery Crawl, a Founders Day event, and participated on the request of the operators of the growing annual 3 day Territory Days Street Fair by operating tours of the 1859 Garvin Cabin, selling home baked cookies (which my dear wife Patsy did so long and well she was credited as furnishing more cookies than any other member over the years. One year we netted \$1,000 from just cookie sales)

And it had obligations even though it did not have a permanent office or museum. The Board met in a Pikes Peak Bank meeting room from time to time, it was offered complete, appraised collections, and had to print and mail its newsletter, and it had to tend to the timely renewal of its CDs containing its Endowment funds.

For several years, Ralph Connor who owned a storage building stored accumulating museum items and collections. He saw the need for a permanent building, so he persuaded the Board to enter into negotiations for the purchase of the original 1890s Jacob Schmidt Beer Hall building at 2611 West Colorado. now with a furniture store which was on the market.

It was a large two story building with a full basement. Our scheme was to apply for grants from El Pomar, Gates, and Boetcher Foundations for the purchase and building improvements, while renting out the second floor as offices, use the front end of the first floor as our Museum, and use the back end for offices and storage. With one other wild idea (mine).



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When I toured the large basement, I saw two large oval doors into one wall - the original, underground 'beer coolers' which Jacob Schmidt used to store beer barrels. And I knew that when two ramshackle building were purchased and torn down right next to the Schmidt Building (which was also called the Mattress Factory building after the very large painted advertising on the buildings side) and that the City had bought the property for another needed 'parking lot' it left at least 20 feet of a grassy area rimmed by an historic decorative Hassel Iron Fence next to the Schmidt west wall.

I visualized a brilliant opportunity to put an outside - close to the sidewalk on Colorado Avenue walkway and stone stairway down to the basement level - and turn it into a Rathskeller, run by an experienced bar operator, selling a new "Jacob Schmidt" Microbrew! At that time microbrews were the rage. Some actually survived. We even registered the name with the State of Colorado! (unfortunately we never brewed the beer)

How appropriate! A 'Beer Hall' just as Jacob Schmidt had one at the turn of the century, among the 21 Saloons on the south side of Colorado Avenue during the roaring days of Colorado City's life!

And then I also set out to write grant applications for the total scheme. The one which hit pay dirt, for a commitment of \$40,000 was the Gates Foundation out of Denver.

But the amount we would require to not only buy the building right on prime commercial space on Colorado Avenue, and pay for the 'up to code' improvements of the old building was too formidable for El Pomar to swallow. They turned down our grant request.

So that project died. And we did not become the only Historical Society In Colorado (or anywhere else for that matter) that also ran a beer hall!

### ***From Beer Hall to Church***

But then another opportunity approached me. Across the street from my 6 N 24th Street home, as 1 South 24th Street (Pikes Peak Avenue being 0) was the 1889 First Baptist Church of Colorado City building.

The Baptists had built another church down on Colorado Avenue, and sold the old building to the Immanuel Missionary congregation sometime in the 1970s or earliest.

Rev Mertsweiler, the relatively new minister for that church, seeing what he concluded I had done to get so much commercial activity in Old Colorado City came to me to see if I could help them sell their building. Their congregation in a steeply declining religion that at one time owned the entire Michael Garman building housing the large Peoples Bible College with hundreds of missionary students, was down to 7 people.

I didn't like the idea of getting a commercial use into that building right across from my family home. But I accepted his invitation to tour the building which I had never been in before.

The upstairs where the church services were held was as expected, and there was the

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Reverend's living quarters with full kitchen and bath, but I was stunned when I went downstairs to see a full basement, with many rooms, good dry floors, an entryway both inside and from the outside, equal to the floor space upstairs, and a modern gas heat furnace.

I instantly saw that the old Church would make a splendid Old Colorado City Historical Center and Museum.

So I circulated that idea within the society, and as luck would have it, four things came together all at once. It was 1991.

First was that old westsider Luther McKnight - whom you remember first asked me in 1976 to help 'do something' for Old Town - was so pleased with what we did saving Old Colorado City, he surprised Ralph Connor whom I introduced to Luther and befriended him after Luther asked me to find him a "Westside Lawyer" (clearly signalling his desire to give away as a bachelor with no family something to the society), by signing over \$90,000 in CD's to the Society! (and later he instructed his distant cousins from Texas that they would get his house, but when the estate was settled he wanted them to give the Society what is left over. That was another \$15,000.

Secondly, what the other-worldly Immanuals really wanted a smaller building for their church. And they did not know how to do standard real estate transactions.

Thirdly, a woman, Lucille Cunningham who, as a real estate broker and property owner had done well on the westside and had joined me at the end of the 1976 Centennial to also join the Old Colorado City Historical Society as a member. She knew what could be done.

In the end the Society, with the \$99,000 bought a small building in the Midland Area for the Immanual's new church, legally swapped it for the 1889 Baptist Church building - and we had our Society's History Center and Museum!

And fourthly, even though our Society did not have the money to really renovate the Church building for our purposes, just as these negotiations were going on, Colorado Voters amended the State Constitution to provide for a State Historical Fund in return for permitting Gambling in Central City, Black Hawk, and Cripple Creek. Gambling taxes would fill up that fund.

Our Society, with Lucille Cunningham now the President, applied for and got \$128,195 to 'restore' the exterior of the Church AND rebuild an inside 'choir balcony' we could use for many purposes. And in those first years starting in 1992, that Fund did NOT require a dollar match. (Later all such grants have to have at least 25% match)

Building that, while the outside of the 'Church' was being professionally restored, Lucille was able to get a series of lesser grants from the Gates, El Pomar, the Boetcher Foundations summing up to \$58,000 together with of 'challenge grant, money raised from a number of sources - including building a 'commemorative patio' outside where members would donate \$100 for bricks in the name of their loved ones. Those funds payed for the complete 'Renovation' of the inside of the building. That was all done by 1995, 3 years after we acquired the building.

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I got one surprise from Lucille when I dropped by while some of the work was being done. She showed me the floor plans for renovation, and pointed to one room. It was named "The Dave Hughes Computer Room!" My reputation for technological and telecommunications savy had penetrated the minds of key members of the Society. Then a local contractor, Charlie Patterson donated all the nice cabinets that went into that room.

It wasn't long before the room was filled up with donated computers, printers, and a modem.

Jack Eckstrom's original drawing of the 1889 First Baptist Church of Colorado City, taken in part from an original photograph from the 1890s I had purchased of the church, became the Society Logo. I donated that large drawing.

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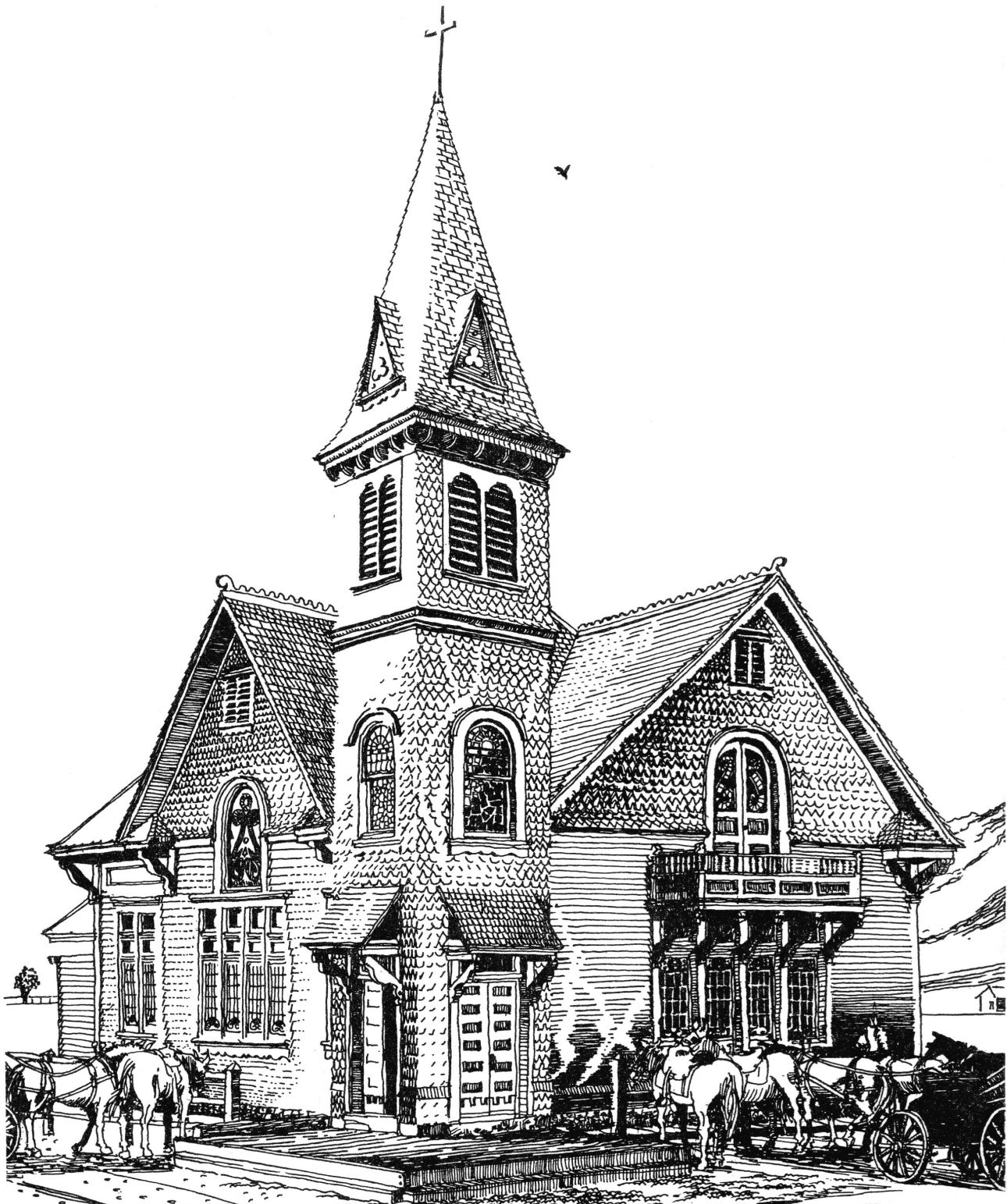
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~~OLD COLORADO CITY HISTORICAL SOCIETY~~  
~~HISTORY CENTER 1992-2010~~

Ekstrom '78

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