

## Old Colorado City Historical Society (3)

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Written by dave

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### *The History Center Launched*

After all the time it took after purchasing the History Center Building, restoring its outside with a State Historical Fund grant, and renovating everything inside - right down to a drinking fountain - with several local El Pomar, Gates, and Boetcher grants the time was by July, 1997 to open the History Center to the public.

The society had been donated a number of 'display cases' cast off by the Pioneer's Museum but only two days before the Center was to be launched those cases were largely empty! Working for two days and one night I carried from my basement and outside storage ALL my collections I had assembled for the previous 20 years, including over \$6,000 worth of items from the original Bock Museum I paid for at its auction.

I did not want the public (350 of whom attended that opening day) to be disappointed by a sparse display, so I worked my butt off getting items in there and into cases. At the time I did NOT persnickity-like record all those things filling out something called 'Deeds of Gift' with its legalistic language. That came back to haunt me years later and some members responsible for the archives (none of whom helped me before the place was open) nit picked whether I had only 'loaned' the items or 'granted' them to the Society. I just, as I usually did, got the job done with an aching back carrying boxes and heavy items, alone, for the items. Lucille Cunningham, the then President thanked me - and that was it. I never took them back out ( to digitize them) for another 14 years. And THAT caused a flap with volunteers who were not even members of the society in 1997.

Below is an extract page from West Word our Newsletter that by then was being mailed to all members, many out of state. You can see how good looking the 'Museum' was.

Since the Display room doubled as a Program Meeting room, we had to find a solution to moving around the display cases every month at least. I found one by buying a roller 'hydraulic lift' that any one person could operate, slide under the heavy glass cases which were on 2-3 inch feet, lift the entire case with items still displayed in it, then pull or push it all to a new - off to the side temporarily - location. That solved the problem.

So we were able, with a projector screen and folding chairs fill the center up to a maximum sometimes of 100 people for a whole series of programs.

My displays - which had lots of Colorado Saloon and Gambling Den paraphernalia - spittoon, whiskey bottles, beer jugs, hand made dominos, gambling cards, dice, Jacob Schmidt Wooden Beer Steins and drawings and photographs of gambling, red lights which had been on Brothel Row, and photographs - were very popular. And unlike anything you would find displays in the uppity Pioneer's Museum downtown.

REAL Colorado City history - warts and all.

## A LOOK AT OUR HISTORY CENTER

### IT'S MORE THAN A MUSEUM

In the eight weeks that the History Center has been open to public, one thing has become obvious. The rich details of Old Colorado City's colorful history may have been lost over the next few generations if our Society had not planned and worked so hard to open the History Center now. We've had quite a number of visitors amazed that they knew very little of Old Town. Still even more visitors wanting to share their own Old Colorado City history with us; history that we're now in the position to collect and preserve. The history of Old Colorado City is not a cut and dry oratory. Our history is the interwoven stories of the life and personality of the many people who made Old Colorado City their home, their workplace and, most importantly, their community.

The Old Colorado City History Center that we have built is the perfect place to showcase this community of people. Not just



*(top photo) Volunteers like Lois Carr are the backbone of the operation of our History Center. Lois works our Book & Gift Shop almost every Wednesday morning. (center photo) An overview of our museum exhibit room. (below left photo) Our 'Red Light' District exhibit featuring the red globes from the front porch lights at Madame Laura Belle's house donated by Bill Aldridge, son of Dorothy Aldridge and wooden beer steins from Jacob Schmidt's Saloon donated by Catherine Henderson and Dave Hughes. (below right) Our school exhibit currently focuses on the last graduating class of Colorado City High School in 1919. Luther McKnight's organ sits in the background. Luther modified the organ to operate with the exhaust of a vacuum cleaner. It also plays piano rolls*



photographs by Paul Idleman



For a brief time we charged for admission, but after I, as Treasurer, calculated the income we

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got from voluntary donations (in a jar) with the number of people who passed through not to count the bookstore sales in its room, it was clear we would make more money by not charging people to see our Museum.

### ***Our Highest-Tech Wirelessly Connected Web Site***

It was just as we fully occupied our new History Center, and I had been given space in the 'Dave Hughes Computer Room' that three things fell into place.

First of all I had already donated one my Old Colorado City Communications computers - a robust 'NT' system, with a modem attached to it with the Society's outside line (which I could use at nights and on the two days when the Center was not open) that my conviction all the Society needed was a Web Site to really move the society into the Information age. Unfortunately a US West T-1 (1.5mbs) line into the Society would cost upwards of \$600 a month - out of the Society's reach.

Secondly, I had already formed a 'Technology Committee' of both volunteers, and our only part time general purposes paid staff member Paul Idleman. Its purpose was to brainstorm how best for us to use a Web site to 'distribute' Old Colorado City's history to the world, to use the computer for Society Administrative purposes (and my use as Treasurer of its Spread Sheet capabilities), as a place to store digitized photographs, current and historical, and put into a Data Base, all the archived collections the society had and which would grow.

But then came the lightning strike out of the Blue.

I got a call from the National Science Foundation for whom I already was doing research projects for both Education and Field Scientist data gathering by the new Unlicensed (thus free connectivity) Spread Spectrum Wireless Technology.

They had absolutely no reason to know I had anything to do with Historical research, much less was a founding member of an Historical Society. But they knew I knew, by now, how to get the most out of Unlicensed Spread Spectrum Wireless - for education, research, and other public purposes in remote or other disadvantaged places.

They said "Dave, we have a \$15,000 grant we can't get any Museum to apply for. They just don't know what they would do with the money, technologically."

And any grant from the NSF has to have an advanced engineering or scientific payoff.

I instantly knew that we could make a zero cost, high bandwidth link from the History Center to drive its web site, and as a side benefit connect up the very small Westside Carnegie Library which had no - and was not going to get a high speed wired link to the Library District. I could from my Old Colorado City Communications Company premises, two blocks away, interconnect

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the wireless link to the full T-1 line connected world internet at a trivial connection cost to myself.

I jumped on the opportunity. I said that if the NSF paid for all the hard ware and software required, I would connect up the small Old Colorado City Historical Society and its Center and its Web site that I was involved with but which it could not afford to link to the net wired. And I think I can also link a very small neighborhood library to it also.

It was a deal. They were ecstatic.

And to make the deal even sweeter - they said that my project would be eligible for one of their \$5,000 'stipend' grants for an Undergraduate to learn from me as a Principle Investigator how the real scientific and engineering world works. An Internship.

It had to be an 'undergraduate' in a college or university. And I had to work with that person to better prepare them for graduate or salaried work in real companies or institutions.

I agreed to that also - \$15,000 for wireless equipment, and \$5,000 for an Intern.

So I quickly applied to them for the \$15,000 grant as a project pioneering "Local History by Wireless' citing the potential for small museums and libraries to be connected to the closest Internet at very little, or no cost. It was promptly granted.

And as soon as that was awarded to the Society, I purchased five 902Mhz Frequency Hopping radios and associated directional antennas and cabling from a Canadian Company. They were called 'Hoppers'. And could relay if needed, and operate in different bands. I already knew they probably would work through Bancroft Park and its large trees to my Old Colo City Comm premises roof. The only question was, would it also penetrate the Michael Garman building in between.

And the Old Colorado City Branch Library was an easy direct shot from the same roof.

And as I calculated, those Hopper's worked fine - right through the trees and to the directional dish antenna on the roof of the Templeton Building. All I had to do was run the heavy cable from the back of the antenna down to inside my OCC office, put one radio there (the other and a directional rod antenna I placed in the attic of the History Center above my computer room) set them up - and voila! We had free broadband Internet connectivity from the world wide web to the Old Colorado City Historical Society's own web site. (and later I put another radio and a directional rod antenna in the tiny Carnegie Library a block away, a switch for several computers the library would furnish for their customers and voila II. The tiny Old Colorado City Public Library became the first of TEN Pikes Peak Library District branch libraries (some large) to be connected to the Internet - free to them and their patrons many of whom came there only to use those computers - looking for work and other things,

I then also went looking for a suitable Intern.

While the NSF naturally thought I would head for the Engineering Department of a University, such as the University of Colorado Colorado Springs campus, or Colorado College's, I surprised

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everybody. I made a bee-line for UCCS's History Department!

And asked whether they could recommend an 'undergraduate' who was good in Colorado History, used and was familiar with personal or college computers.

They came up with the perfect candidate - a young woman - Ladonna Gunn (actually from Rifle Colorado) was married and a few years older than most other students, but was going to graduate by springs with a Bachelor of Arts in History, and would be pursuing a Master's degree also.

She was a natural. I offered her the position, and since she and her husband lived in Wetmore, Colorado, 50 miles away, and she drove to classes several times a week. This would work fine since she could do work for us under my supervision parts of at least 2 maybe 3 days a week.

She did a terrific job after I introduced her to the intricacies of wireless, Internet, and web site management. With her already solid background in Historical Research she not only visited the large Penrose Library and the Pioneer's Museum which had old manuscripts from some of the pioneers, she was able to start populating the Web Site with facts, stories and some early photographs she researched. And wrote and signed short historical pieces.

Our Tech Committee came up with a front page design for the web site that made it easy for people with web browsers to really search the site - and we began - very early in the culture of web sites - to make an impression on the local history-interested public. But even more importance, just as this site started operating in 1997, the wave of 'genealogical research' started. Everyone wanted to find their ancestors online.

And soon we had not only distant descendants of early Colorado City pioneers find us and history about their own kin, but start sending us documents, maps, photographs that NO local institution had ever seen about their lives in the original Colorado Territory. Which we in turn put on the web site. Furthermore many of them became dues paying, even Lifetime, members of our Historical Society and contributed as much to our historical research and they got.

My foresight in getting a society website up for a tiny historical society about a long-gone pioneer town paid off big over the next 15 years.

And we gave solid 'Proof of Concept' to the National Science Foundation who funded the radios, that the smallest and most remote Historical Societies and their Museums could be connected world-wide, via the Internet and unlicensed wireless connectivity.

A longer summary of that NSF Project can be found at:

<http://wireless.oldcolo.com/course/history.html>

Suffice it to say, for 14 years the History Society had broadband wireless access to the Internet at no cost to itself and a trivial (even unmeasurable) 'added cost' to my Old Colorado City Communications high speed connection to the Internet for my business and NSF project

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purposes. Until I closed down my telecom business after US West (then called Qwest) after 13 years extended DSL service 3 miles from downtown to Old Colorado City - and the Society could afford that telephone-line based lower speed broadband. Also Comcast television extended its cable internet services to the area, but which, for the Society, would be costly to add to its already existing voice line service.

And the small Old Colorado City Library had, for almost 10 years, equally free Internet service for the handful of patrons who daily approached the libraries desk top computers. Until the large Library District added a big chunk to its annual budget and extended dedicated fiber broadband to all 10 of its branch libraries.

Little old Colorado City Historical Society was far ahead of all of them, and in the next chapter I will describe just what it did for the Society AND the long disappeared history of the original Colorado City AND its long forgotten pioneers, information about whom was never collected properly by the El Paso Pioneers Association or the original Pioneer's Museum when they or their direct descendents lived.

Suffice it to say the Society has held scores of programs - historical lectures, performances, meetings in its General Display room which can seat over 100, since the Center was opened in 1995.

Here is a sample of a well addended one in 2006. It is a 4 minute extract of the 50 minute program by Mark Gardner, musician and expert on early eawest music.

Just Click on

[HistoricalSocietyProgramCowboyMusic](#)