

# Lafayette Historical Society AND Miners Museum

Winter Newsletter 2018

108 E. Simpson Street, Lafayette, Colorado 80026 303-665-7030 minersmuseum@cityoflafayette.com

## Call for Committee Members

The Miners Museum has positions open in two of its committees. Are you interested in non-profit fundraising or museum operations?

The Fundraising Committee will meet on the third Monday of the month at 6:00pm in the Miners Museum. Funding for the Miners Museum comes from grants, donations, and membership dues. In order to continue operating the museum and expanding our programs, we need to increase our funding to ensure our long-term viability. Please contact Gerry Morrell if you are interested in joining. [morrell203@comcast.net](mailto:morrell203@comcast.net)

The Mission, Vision, and Governance Committee will meet on the second Monday of every month at 7:30pm in the Miners Museum. This committee focuses on creating governing documents and strategic planning for the Lafayette Miners Museum. Please contact Christina Pearce if you are interested in joining. [christina.e.pearce@gmail.com](mailto:christina.e.pearce@gmail.com)

## CHRISTMAS EVE 1936

Leaving home on Christmas Eve after dark was an unusual experience for a five-year-old. But then a large brightly lit Christmas tree came into view as we walked from our house on Geneseo Street toward the Town Hall. The dark and cold were forgotten. Many children and adults were gathered around the semi-circular porch that seemed to be a raised stage provided especially for this event. A piano had been placed there to lead the crowd in Christmas carols and everyone joined in to sing the familiar tunes. This was great fun, but the children and I were restless for the rest of the program to begin. Finally, gathered around the edge of the porch, each child was presented with a small brown grocery bag filled with candy. In 1936 this may have been the only treats some of these children would receive for Christmas. Too soon the experience was concluded.

What was this all about? As a 5½-year-old I had no appreciation for the organization of such an event or for the work that adults put in for the benefit of the community and the children. I remember some of the excitement, but in later life I began to wonder who had conceived this idea, who organized it, who did the work, how was it paid for? Was the tree real, or were boughs twined around the flagpole? Was there really a piano on the porch? And was this the only year the program was held? I could only remember the 1936 event.

*Thanks to Lafayette's library and to the microfilm of the local paper The Lafayette Leader I was able to satisfy myself about the answers to some of these questions:*

**Friday December 4, 1936** -- Lions Club Holds Meeting – "... Plans are being made for a community Christmas Tree, and the Lodges and Clubs of the community and other organizations interested, are to be invited to all get together in providing one large Christmas Tree and a gift for the children of Lafayette. Lee Baker was appointed as chairman of this committee and organizations willing to help are asked to get in touch with the chairman. Lafayette has had no community get together for sometime, and all should strive to help make this a success, and a yearly event"

Lee Baker owned and operated a grocery store across Baseline south of what is now the Lafayette recreation center. So there was an organized effort and plans to make the Christmas celebration an annual event. But this was December 4th and not much time available to organize a very ambitious program.

**Friday December 11, 1936** -- A Community Tree for Lafayette -- "The Lafayette Lions Club is sponsoring a community Christmas this Yuletide, and they will need the help and cooperation of every individual and organization willing to assist in bringing a small bit of sunshine and happiness into the hearts of many of



Lafayette City Hall  
201 E. Simpson

our children of this community. The club is putting forth every effort to raise enough funds to be able to purchase the necessary amount of supplies to give every child a real Christmas treat. This plan is being organized somewhat late, and the necessary funds are needed immediately, so they are asking that any who feel they wish to help promote real Christmas cheer to our many youngsters of Lafayette to donate whatever amount they wish to give, to help make this a real annual community gathering that can be looked forward to with great pleasure and anticipation. Remember when you were a kid, how you looked forward to that momentous occasion when Santa was due, with his sack of good things, and remember, there were a few children in the neighborhood whom Santa might not reach unless he got some help? Lee Baker, Chairman of the Community tree committee is in charge – don't forget, only two weeks until Christmas."

Emil Sands owned and operated the newspaper and it is evident that he promoted this event vigorously.

There were no items in the newspaper of December 18th, which seems strange, considering that only one week remained before Christmas and that there had been no notice about what time the event was to begin.

**Friday December 25, 1936** – Christmas Tree for Lafayette ... "A committee from each organization in Lafayette met at the Town Hall Friday evening (this would have been December 18th) to form a permanent 'Community Christmas Tree' organization. Lee Baker was appointed chairman, A. L. Hagerman Secretary and Mike Smith Treasurer. It was the voice represented there that it would be very nice to carry this on each year as Louisville does. The tree for the children will be held tonight at the Town Hall and it is expected that 1000 sack (sic) of candy will be given away on this evening. We will publish the donations and collections in next weeks (sic) paper."

*Note the competitive reference to the neighboring community, which may have been holding celebrations like this in previous years.*

**Friday January 1, 1937** – Xmas Tree Treat Is Big Success ... "Lafayette's first Christmas Tree treat for the kiddies turned out to be a great success. The committee filled 1000 sacks of candy with an orange included and 650 were given out that evening. Clerk Metz distributed the balance of the candy to the old people of Lafayette and Lenny had most of it to do. The committee will meet sometime after the holiday and the names of those who helped to make this a success will be published (sic) in the Leader".

*So I did remember some of this event correctly. Could there really have been 650 children there?*

**Friday January 8, 1937** – Lions Club Meets In Regular Session -- "...Reports were heard on the Community

Christmas tree from Lee Baker chairman. As a result of the combined efforts of Mr. Baker as chairman, Geo. Allen, Emil Sands and Lennie Metz, they received the full cooperation of the Town Board and the many lodge organizations of the Community. A donation of \$25.00 each from the Club and the Town Board started this plan to success, with donations from the many clubs and lodge organizations and other business men and townspeople. A fund of over \$100.00 was collected with approximately 1000 bags of candy and an orange given to our children. The success of this year's tree has resulted in the forming of a Christmas tree club, with the appointment of a President and Secretary Treasurer for the year 1937, with definite plans for making this an annual event. A nice surplus was turned over to the Treasurer toward next years (sic) tree. ..."

(As an interesting addition to the item of Christmas business, the Lions Club was also making plans to sponsor a community building with an expanded library.)

Another item in the January 8th edition: "CARD OF THANKS - The committee of the Lafayette 'Community Christmas Tree' wish to thank every one for the splendid cooperation we received especially the ladies who helped to sack the treats. On account of an incomplete list of donations we will publish list in the next issue of the Leader. Signed C.C.Tree Com. by Lee Baker Chairman"

**Friday January 15, 1937** – List of Donators -- "List of Donators (sic) to community Xmas Tree fund.

Fred Autrey; Sam Lucock; Eastern Star; Mike O'Day; John Zaike; L.D. Lay; Karl Jensen; Stumpfs Tavern; E.G. Sands; Jessie Irwin; Ted's Liquor store; Crandall's Auto Service; Alexander Barber shop; Avery Williams; Toney's Texaco; D. A. Bennett; Fred Campbell; George Allen; Conoco Service; Guy Keller; Silver Coin Oil Co.; George Brignane; Shorty's Place; Rodwick Store; Electric Shoe Shop; Geo. Bermont; Dick's furniture; Dow Drug; Davis Merc.; Chas Scholes; Clemmons Service; Hiway Drug; Dr. Hurt; Lennie Metz; James Berry; Lafayette Fire Department; Lafayette Greenhouse; Harry Noble Sr.; Rebekahs; A.L.Hagerman; Lafayette Gun Club; Tom Treasure; Lee Baker; G.P.Mariotti; Pythian sisters; Harry Westbrook; Dad Burkes; W.B.A.; Lafayette Lions Club; IOOF Lodge; Town of Lafayette; Mike Smith; Knights of Pythias; Public Service Co.; Ralph Miller; Wm. Gallagher Jr.; Lafayette Lumber Co.; C.L.Grief; Vivan Chavez; Louis Chavez; Abelira Muniz; Emilia Rodriguez; Mike Anaya; Jacobo Espinoza; R.B.Vigil.

**Jack M. Angevine August 2004/December 2006**

## Changes on Simpson Street

Simpson Street was Lafayette's "main" street when Lafayette was founded. The photo on the left shows George Bermont's Store at the north west corner of Simpson and Iowa. In the 1940's the building was purchased by Roy "Ham" Roberts who remodeled the store by taking off the second floor and opened Robert's Grocery. The second floor was removed because the "non-fired" bricks the store was built with were falling apart. Ham Roberts sold the store to Allen Hale who opened Hale's Market. The business was sold two more times and finally went out of business in the late 1980's.

In 2012 the building was demolished and townhouses were built.



George Bermont's Store early 1900's



Roberts Grocery late 1960's



Milagro Friendly Market late 1980's



Simpson St. and Iowa St. 2018

### Greenwood Fund

The Denver Foundation has awarded the Lafayette Historical Society a Greenwood Fund grant. The grant is \$1,500 to be used toward proper care and housing of our textile collection. We will be working between now and August to improve the preservation of these fragile materials. We would like to thank the Greenwood Fund Committee and the donors that make this work possible.

The Lafayette Historical Society would like to thank and acknowledge:

The **Black Diamond Restaurant** for catering our October ANFRM meeting.

# Morning at the Monarch

By Nicholas Bernhard

January marks the anniversary of the Monarch Mine explosion, the worst accident in local mining history. The Monarch Mine was located two miles south of Louisville, and was one of the longest-running mines in the region.

The Northern Coal Field was no stranger to accidents. Lafayette's first mayor, Thomas J. Miller, died at the Strathmore, a mine where he was superintendent. The founder of the Rocky Mountain Fuel Company was killed at his company's Vulcan Mine. In the 1900s, Lafayette's Simpson Mine had a cave-in, damaging Simpson Street. Mine owner John Simpson appeared before Lafayette City Council, and asked who was going to fix the roads.

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, coal mining had a mortality rate of nearly 300 per 100,000 workers. The most dangerous job in America today, logging, has less than half the number of deaths. Coal miners could be killed by falling rock, electrocution, runaway mine carts, a kick from a mule, getting a rope caught around their neck, or suffocation.

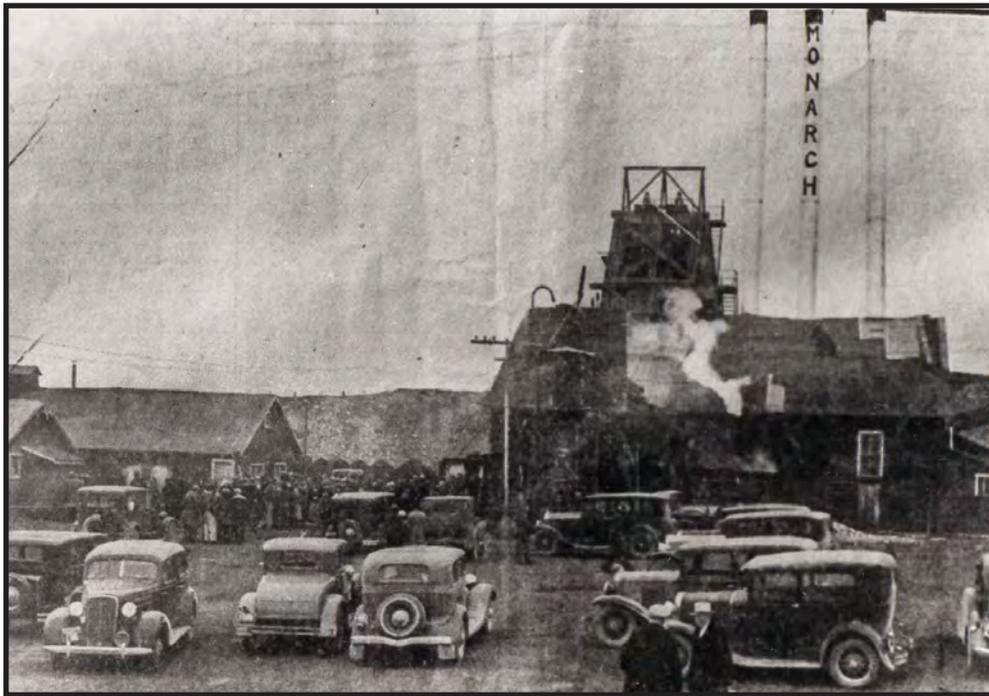
The flammable gas produced by coal made fires and explosions a constant threat. The earliest coal miners worked by candlelight, and later oil lamps, with flames six inches long. These flames could contact pockets of gas near the ceiling of a coal room. Even when safety lamps, and electric headlamps were adopted, the spark of a mule's horseshoe against the mine cart's track could ignite a deadly conflagration.

The Monarch Mine was rocked by such an explosion on January 20<sup>th</sup>, 1936, at 6:20 AM. Two men escaped through the air shaft, and eight were trapped

underground. The blast could be heard for miles, and caused massive damage to the mine's surface buildings.

It took hours to reach the trapped miners. The Monarch's shaft was 375 feet deep, and the rescuers had to use an entrance nearly a mile away. By the time rescuers reached the miners, they were dead. Seven bodies were found, with the body of Joe Jaramillo still missing. When recovery of Jaramillo's body looked hopeless, with no chance he had survived, the National Fuel Company paid his widow a large sum of money to end the search, and resume mining.

Today, the Monarch Mine is all but forgotten. A



People gathering at the Monarch Mine the morning after the explosion waiting to hear from the rescuers.

memorial to the miners who died can be found in Broomfield's Frank Varra Park, along the US 36 Bikeway. Louisville's Monarch High School gets its name from the mines. The body of Joe Jaramillo was never recovered, and lies buried in the Monarch's tunnels, far

below the Flatiron Crossing Mall, to this day.

Sources: Jim Hutchison, *Treeless Plain to Thriving City*, *US Government Data*, *In the Carbide Light: Tools of the Northern Coal Field*, *Lafayette City Council Minutes*, *Once a Coal Miner* by Phyllis Smith.

## The Lafayette Miners Museum Mission Statement

*The mission of the Lafayette Miners Museum is to showcase the history of Lafayette, Colorado, especially as it refers to coal mining and miner's lifestyles. The Museum will serve and educate the interested public through the collection, preservation and interpretation of artifacts and materials that represent the history of the Lafayette area.*

# Coal-Country Gridiron

On December 10<sup>th</sup>, 1937, Lafayette High School won the state football championship. This December marks the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of their win, the most celebrated athletic achievement in Lafayette history.

The high school football team was a point of pride in Lafayette, as it faced the hardships of the Great Depression, and a declining coal industry, and the deadly Monarch Mine disaster the year before. High-schooler Chuck Waneka, who played on the championship team, recalled practicing football with work shoes held together by belts, later making his own shoes.

The demands placed on the high school football team often clashed with the demands of farming in Lafayette. Many high-schoolers in Lafayette were expected to be working on the family farm whenever they weren't in school. In 1935, Lafayette High School was in a playoff game, but the team's fullback, Joe Distel, hadn't finished his tractor work. His teammates drove into the field, pulled him off the tractor, and put him into the game at second quarter. Lafayette won 33-0.

Distel's teammates drove him back to the farm, where he finished his tractor work. Distel's father never knew he was gone.

Lafayette's 1937 season began with embarrassing losses, including two games where they were shut out. A winning streak for the rest of the season took Lafayette into the state championship: an away-game at Burlington. At least 200 people took the train to Burlington for the game, and many others drove the 180 miles to watch the game.

In spite of two players out with injuries, including their quarterback, Lafayette beat Burlington 13-7. Lafayette fans stormed the field, fighting Burlington fans to tear down the goalposts, and carrying them to the train station.

The Lafayette football team was greeted by a crowd of 1,500 people at Denver's Union Station, three-quarters of the entire town. There was a marching band, and a banquet feast presented by the Lions Club. They returned to the state championship the following year, losing to Limon 6-0.

Lafayette High School won a second state championship in 1965. Their longtime rival, the Louisville Pirates, won once, in 1948. In 1972, both

schools closed, merging into Centaurus High School. Centaurus has won championships in girls' basketball, boy's cross country, and wrestling, but has yet to win one for football.

Sources: Treeless Plain to Thriving City, U.S. Census Data

To learn more about this and other stories from local history, come visit the Miners Museum: 108 E. Simpson Street, Lafayette, CO. Open Tuesdays, 7 – 9 PM, Thursdays and Saturdays 2 – 4 PM. Open by appointment, (303) 665-7030



## Annual Holiday Open House

On December 16th the Miners Museum held our annual Holiday Open House. There was a great turnout of members and people who had never seen the Museum.



## Time to Renew Your Membership

In 2016 the Lafayette Historical Society changed the dues structure. Your membership dues are now due on January 1st each year, unless you are a life-time member. Below is the form you can fill out and send in with your dues.

Renewing your membership is important to continuing the mission of the Lafayette Historical Society and the Miners Museum.

### WANT TO BE A MEMBER OR NEED TO RENEW

Fill out the application and mail to: **Lafayette Miners Museum** 108 E. Simpson St., Lafayette, CO 80026

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Cell \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

#### Please Check Membership Category

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Individual .....\$15                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Business..... \$50 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family (2+immediate family)..... \$25 | <input type="checkbox"/> Life..... \$100    |

Amount Enclosed \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Make check payable to Lafayette Historical Society.

*Membership dues are tax deductible.*

How do you want to receive correspondence?  Email or  Hard Copy



#### LAFAYETTE MINERS MUSEUM

108 East Simpson Street  
Lafayette, Colorado 80026