

# FIRST DRAFT

## Help sought for 1930 obelisk that celebrated pioneers, new highway

In the summer of 1931, the year that the Pioneer Monument was dedicated near the mouth of Plateau Canyon, another event occurred there that was equally worthy of public notice.

The highway along the Colorado River was extended east from Plateau Canyon all the way to De Beque. Prior to that, motorists had to follow the Plateau Canyon road upstream to the De Beque Cutoff, then follow that north-eastward to De Beque.

The new section of what was then called Colorado River Highway shaved eight miles off the journey between Plateau Canyon and De Beque and added a new, scenic section of roadway.

So, when nearly 100 people gathered near the mouth of Plateau Canyon on June 14, 1931, to watch the unveiling of the Pioneer Monument, dedicated by the Grand Junction Elks Lodge 575, they also were there to celebrate the opening of the new section of highway.

The 14-mile section of gravel highway had cost \$600,000 and was paid for with federal and state highway money, the crowd was told.

Pioneer Monument stood at the entrance to Plateau Canyon for more than 30 years. Around 1954, a small travelers' stop was added, called DEPLATO. It was built where the pull-out now exists at the entrance to Plateau Canyon on Colorado Highway 65.

DEPLATO included a gas station, fruit stand, a small diner and gift shop. In the early 1960s, when the Colorado Department of Highways was preparing to build a section of Interstate 70 through De Beque Canyon, most of the buildings were moved a few miles to the west.

The restaurant became known as Thompson's Corral, with a gas station next door. It was owned by Alex Thompson, who later became Mesa County's coroner.

Still later, Thompson sold the truck stop and restaurant to Gay Johnson. Now called the Exxon Truck Stop, it sits on the south side of I-70 at the interchange that serves Island Acres on the north side.

Also, early in the 1960s, Pioneer Monument was moved from the mouth of Plateau Canyon to state land near Thompson's Corral.

"There used to be picnic tables, benches and a sprinkler system. It was all maintained by previous truck stop owners," said Joel Berschauer, with what's now called the Colorado Department of Transportation.

"There was never an actual agreement between CDOT and the property owners; it was just a good ol' boys handshake back in the day," he added.

However, when the truck stop was last sold, maintenance of the site was discontinued.

During the more than half-century that Pioneer Monument has been at its current location, it has begun to deteriorate.

Only one of the plaques that originally graced all four sides of the obelisk remains. The top is crumbling, and the small park surrounding the monument needs maintenance.

Enter members of the Plateau Valley Historical Preservation Society. They have contacted Berschauer about the possibility of maintaining the 90-year-old monument.

Beverly Duzenak, a member of the Plateau Valley group, said they have worked closely with Priscilla Walker of the Palisade Historical Society in seeking photos and information



BOB SILBERNAGEL/Special to the Sentinel

Beverly Duzenak of the Plateau Valley Historical Preservation Society stands in front of Pioneer Monument, which the historical group hopes to work to preserve.

about the old monument.

"I learned about the monument four years ago, and I was fascinated," said Duzenak.

For one thing, the woman who unveiled the monument at the ceremony in 1931, Jessie Scrimgeour Anderson, was related to a prominent Plateau Valley family, the Ridenours.

Additionally, because the monument originally sat at the entrance to Plateau Canyon, it would have been seen by all who traveled that road.

For those reasons, and because the monument is an important marker of this region's early highway system, Duzenak said, "We want to keep it tidy and neat, replace the fence around it, replace the signs (that have disappeared on three sides) and put up an interpretive sign."

She said the group also hopes to replace the concrete top of the monument, which is crumbling.

Berschauer, with CDOT's Utility and Permits section in Grand Junction, said he is pleased the historical groups are taking an interest in the monument.

"I believe this is a great idea and will issue a permit to the historical societies if they decide to pursue the repairs and maintenance," he said.

Before that can occur, Duzenak said, the Plateau Valley group needs to raise some money through donations and enlist more volunteers to ensure it has the resources to take on the neglected monument.

The ceremony unveiling the monument was not neglected 90 years ago on June 14 — Flag Day. A few days before the dedication, The Daily Sentinel reported that extra automobiles were needed to carry people from Grand Junction to the ceremony.

The local Elks Lodge sent invitations to Elks around the state and in Utah. Additionally, political leaders like Congressman Edward Taylor and Gov. William Adams were expected to attend. Leaders of the Grand Junction Elks Lodge and representatives of the Highway Department were among the



PALISADE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

This stop for travelers was at the entrance to Plateau Canyon during the 1950s and early 1960s, until it was moved for Interstate 70. Pioneer Monument stood nearby.

speakers.

William Weiser, who was then this region's representative on the Colorado Highway Commission, told of the state-wide cooperation that made it possible to get the money to allow construction on this important section of highway.

Charles J. Moynihan of Grand Junction gave what the Sentinel described as an "eloquent" speech about pioneers who helped develop this nation, called "Those Who Blazed the Trail."

A group of what the Sentinel said were "pretty girls" marched before the crowd carrying American flags from different periods in our history, then arranged themselves in front of the speakers' platform while an orchestra played patriotic music.

One inscription on the side of Pioneer Monument read: "Colorado River Highway Dedicated To The Pioneers of the Mountains and the Valleys of Western Colorado"

That plaque still exists on the east side of the old monument. But the plaques on the other three sides of the obelisk have long since disappeared.

It is known that one of the missing plaques listed Gov. Adams, members of the State Highway Advisory Board and

state highway engineers.

It isn't known what the plaques on the other two sides of the monument said, or whether they duplicated the others.

There is little doubt, however, that in 1931, residents of the region were pleased, not only to honor pioneers who came before, but to see an important new section of highway opened.

As the Sentinel put it then, no one regretted the "new level graveled highway along the Colorado river" replacing "the old desolate road (the De Beque Cutoff) where the route wound for miles through dunes and alkali flats and solitude where nobody ever has or probably ever will live."

Anyone interested in volunteering or donating to the Pioneer Monument project, or who has more information about the original monument, should contact Beverly Duzenak by phone, at 970-268-5454, by mail at P.O. Box 298, Mesa, 81643, or by email at duzenack@acsol.net.

Sources: Plateau Valley Historical Society; Palisade Historical Society; historic editions of The Daily Sentinel through www.newspapers.com; email interview with Joel Berschauer.

Bob Silbernagel's email is bobsilbernagel@gmail.com.



### THIS WEEK IN THE LEGISLATURE

DENVER — This week, the House State, Civic, Military and Veterans Affairs Committee is to hear SB247, a measure that attempts to readjust some of the deadline requirements of the newly formed Congressional and Legislative redistricting commissions. That's needed because of a delay in precinct-by-precinct population data from the U.S. Census Bureau that is needed to redraw congressional and legislative district lines, which is done once every 10 years.

**Monday:** The House Finance Committee is to hear HB1189, a measure that adds additional protections against air toxins in "covered facilities."

**Tuesday:** The Senate State, Veterans and Military Affairs Committee is to discuss HB1071, a measure that would allow municipalities to go to ranked-choice voting, but only in nonpartisan elections such as city councils. Such voting methods, which are already in use around the nation, allow voters to choose more than one candidate, but by their level of preference. If no candidate wins more than 50%, candidates who win the most votes proceed to a run-off election.

**Wednesday:** The House Judiciary

Committee is to look at HB1280, a measure that would require courts to hold bond-setting hearings within 48 hours after someone's arrest, even if it's for a defendant picked up because of a warrant from another jurisdiction. The ACLU filed a lawsuit last week against Mesa and Boulder county officials related to this issue.

**Thursday:** The House State Affairs panel is to consider SB132, a measure calling for a study of the impacts of how digital communications, such as social media, use such technology as algorithms and face recognition. The measure is greatly watered down from actually attempting to regulate how digital technology is used.

**Next week:** A House committee is to take up SB116, a measure already approved in the Senate to ban the use of Native American mascots in public schools sports programs.

All floor action and committees can be watched or heard on the Colorado Legislature's website at lege.colorado.gov. Check that website to see which measures are available for remote testimony, and how to register to speak.

— Charles Ashby

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