

FIRST DRAFT

Old Palisade High School building served students, community well

In early 1925, the situation was dire at the Palisade school building, according to what was then the School District 19 Board of Education.

"One hundred ten children in the grades are in basement rooms, badly lighted, wrongly heated and impossible of ventilation," the board wrote in an open letter to its taxpayers. "Eighty high school students residing in basement rooms. Formation of Junior High School impossible.

"No adequate or suitable provision was ever made for High School classes in the present building," the board said.

The Board of Education was pleading with taxpayers in the district to support a bond issue to build a new high school, even though the then-Palisade school building, which housed all grades, was only 15 years old.

The voters responded, and in February of 1925, they approved \$39,000 in bonds to construct a new school, although they defeated an associated increase in the mill levy to help pay for the school.

Multiple generations attended high school in the building approved by voters in 1925. It also served the community for a variety of other functions, from local theater productions to band concerts to meetings for local agricultural producers.

"It's amazing just how important the high school was in the life of the community," said Priscilla Walker of the Palisade Historical Society. She attended high school in the 1925 building and graduated there in 1967.

That building, which opened in 1926 and served as the high school until the new Palisade High School opened in 1993, is now being torn down.

It will make room for a new medical clinic in Palisade, being built in conjunction with Community Hospital.

The town of Palisade obtained the building from School District 51 several years ago. Initially, there was some discussion of restoring the building, which had been empty for more than a decade, but that proved too costly.

Estimates for restoring the old high school were \$6 million to \$7 million, said Palisade Mayor Greg Mikolai.

"And then what would we do with it?" he added. "At some point, you have to look at what will benefit the community most. Demolishing the old building accomplishes that, Mikolai said, especially since "We haven't had direct medical services in Palisade for 20 years."

The new medical facility, estimated to cost \$3.5 million, will be funded by the town, Mesa County and Community Hospital.

However, the gymnasium attached to the old high school will remain. The gym has been the main cultural component of the old campus for more than a decade, Mikolai noted. It has been used for a multitude of community functions.

The auditorium-gymnasium was added to the 1925 school in the 1930s and dedicated in 1940.

When it opened, "it was the largest basketball court in western Colora-



PALISADE HISTORICAL SOCIETY
The school building was constructed in 1900 in Palisade. Students and faculty are shown.



PALISADE HISTORICAL SOCIETY
The 1910 Palisade school building, as it appeared soon after it opened. This building was torn down in 1970, and the Palisade Fire Department now sits on that space. The 1925 high school was built just to the east (left in this photo) of this building.



PALISADE HISTORICAL SOCIETY PHOTO/Courtesy of Gordon Stewart.
Old Palisade High School building as it appeared shortly after it was constructed in 1925.

do," according to the Palisade Historical Society.

However, two other additions to the 1925 building, which were constructed in the 1950s and 1960, are also being torn down.

The 1925 high school was actually the fourth school building in Palisade, Walker said.

"The first, built in 1893 was on Second Street," near where public restrooms currently sit. The second was built in 1900 near where the Palisade Post Office now stands.

The third was the 1910 high school, built approximately where the Palisade Fire Department building is now. The tower on the Fire Department was designed to be similar to the towers on the 1910 building.

That school, with its basement classrooms that caused the Board of Education so much consternation in 1925, remained in active use for many years, although the basement classrooms

were closed.

Elementary and junior high classes were in that building into the 1960s, and the building was finally demolished in 1970.

The 1925 high school produced student athletes and academics, both a source of community pride. Palisade High School's first state football championship was won by the 1958 team from that school, and its first state baseball championship was earned by the school's 1969 team, Walker said.

Many state and regional high-school band winners attended the school, as well as speech and debate champions.

The 1925 building was the first one in Palisade designed specifically as a high school, but high school students began graduating from Palisade much earlier.

The earliest photo still in existence of Palisade High School graduates is from 1906. It shows five young women, but no young men as graduates.

This photo of the 1906 high school graduation class from Palisade is the earliest extant photo of any Palisade graduation class.

PALISADE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

However, Walker said there were probably high school graduates as early as 1901, but no photos were taken or they were lost. Additionally, some years there may not have been any graduates.

During those early years, Palisade High School wasn't the only high school at the east end of the valley. There was also Mount Lincoln High School, the remains of which are now a private residence on G Road, east of Palisade.

At one time, Mount Lincoln included a two-story brick building for elementary and junior high, and a frame building for high school.

One famous graduate of Mount Lincoln High was Wayne Aspinall, who later became a teacher at Palisade High School, and later still, western Colorado's longest-serving congressman.

By 1924, however, Mount Lincoln school officials had decided that maintaining a high school was no longer possible. So the tiny district purchased a 32-passenger bus to transport high school students.

They didn't send them to Palisade, however. The bus carried the Mount Lincoln students to Grand Junction High School each day. The reason? "I think the tuition for the out-of-district students was cheaper in Grand Junction than Palisade," Walker said.

The first driver of the bus, known as the "Peach Special," was Harvey Ball. Young Mr. Ball also happened to be a high-school student himself, even as he piloted the bus. He graduated from Grand Junction High School in 1925.

In Palisade in 2022, work to demolish the high school building constructed almost a century ago is continuing, in preparation for the new community clinic.

Sources: *Historic newspapers at Colorado Historic Newspaper.org and newspapers.com; Palisade Historical Society newsletters; interviews with Priscilla Walker and Greg Mikolai.*

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2022 THIS WEEK IN THE LEGISLATURE

DENVER — Committees continue to hear from various state agencies throughout the week, getting detailed reports of what each state department, office and agency have been doing over the past year.

Today through Friday: Various committees continue SMART hearings. That stands for State Measurement for Accountable, Responsive and Transparent Government, a 2013 law that requires the Legislature to receive detailed information about what all state agencies and offices have been doing.

Next week: Various

committees in the House and Senate are to begin considering their first bills, some of which deal with ways to keep costs and fees down for Coloradans dealing with high inflation, others of which focus on public safety and child care needs.

All floor action and committees can be watched or heard on the Colorado Legislature's website at leg.colorado.gov.

Check that website to see which measures are available for remote testimony, and how to register to speak.

— Charles Ashby

Extra aircraft noise expected in military training exercise

NELLIS AIR FORCE BASE, Nev. — The U.S. Air Force has said southern Nevada residents can expect increased aircraft noise from a scheduled training exercise that will involve nearly 100 aircraft, with nighttime take-offs planned to allow air crews to train for combat operations conducted at night.

Nellis Air Force Base officials said Red Flag 22-1 will run from today to Feb. 11 over the Nevada Test and Training Range

north of Las Vegas.

According to Nellis officials, the exercise will involve more than a dozen aircraft types with the 388th Fighter Wing from Hill Air Force Base in Utah playing a prominent role in the exercise.

The announcement said the exercise "gives aircrews an opportunity to experience advanced, relevant, and realistic combat-like situations in a controlled environment."

—The Associated Press

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