

FIRST DRAFT



MESA COUNTY SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT

Former Mesa County Sheriff John Reeder as he appeared circa 1930.



Michael Kennedy and Riley Parker of Palisade's Sunshine Rotary Club prepare to replace a tattered flag with a new one at the Reeder-installed flagpole at what's now being called Reeder Point.

COURTESY OF MICHAEL KENNEDY

John Reeder's flagpole still has Old Glory flying above Palisade

This Memorial Day, the American flag flies high on a cliff above the town of Palisade, just as a former Mesa County sheriff intended when he planted the flagpole there more than a century ago.

In May of 1915, while war raged in Europe



BOB SILBERNAGEL

but the U.S. had not yet entered the conflagration that would become known as World War I, former Sheriff John D. Reeder felt compelled to show some patriotism.

Reeder, who then worked for the J.W. Hugus Department Store in Palisade and owned a fruit farm near the town, had decided to place a large American flag on a 30-foot-tall steel pole on a point on the cliff above Palisade.

His effort drew praise from several quarters.

"Old Glory Now Floats," read an enthusiastic Palisade Tribune headline on May 7, 1915.

The Daily Sentinel was nearly as excited when it reported the placing of the flag on the cliffs above Palisade.

"Now a nine foot flag can be seen any time if you will gaze northward to the top of the bluff, which shows what an enterprising citizen can do if he so determines."

But getting the heavy steel flagpole hauled to the top of the cliff, then raising it and setting it in concrete, proved to be more effort than Reeder originally anticipated.

Keeping the flag flying over the intervening decades has also been a problem, with different groups replacing flags.

Most recently, the Sunrise Rotary Club of Palisade assumed care of the flag, beginning in June of last year. The club began referring to the spot where the flag flies as "Reeder Point."

Although it is more than 1,000 feet above the town on the cliffs to the north, the flag can easily be spotted on a clear day from Palisade's Main Street.

That Sunrise Rotary effort was spearheaded by member Michael Kennedy and club President Riley Parker. They and other members have replaced the flag several times as it became tattered from constant wind.



COURTESY OF MICHAEL KENNEDY

This panoramic view of a tattered flag and the valley below was photographed in October 2020. Constant winds on the cliff face north of Palisade regularly destroy flags flying on John Reeder's flagpole.

When vandals cut the ropes that allowed the flag to be raised and lowered, the club replaced the lines with steel rope donated by Vines 79 Vine Bar of Palisade.

Keeping the flag flying demands continuous effort, as it did in Reeder's time. But John D. Reeder was used to continuous effort. The Sentinel was right on the mark in 1915 when it referred to him as "an enterprising citizen."

In 2020, I wrote about Reeder's career as a Mesa County undersheriff and sheriff. During his eight years with the Sheriff's Office, he recaptured two escapees from the county jail and had a horse shot out from under him while pursuing another fugitive. He also kept a pet bear at the jail for a time.

Reeder, a native of Missouri, arrived in the Grand Valley in 1883, just two years after the town was founded. He was the first person to homestead land west of Whitewater on what is now called Reeder Mesa. He served as clerk of the county court, deputy county assessor and deputy postmaster for Grand Junction.

By 1892, he was working as undersheriff for the county, and became sheriff in 1896.

Later on, however, he moved east. Initially, he worked for the J.W. Hugus & Co. store in De Beque, but by 1907 he was managing the company's store in Palisade.

In addition, he served as a cashier at Hugus company's Palisade Bank.

He also was involved in local politics, serving first on the Palisade Town Board of Trustees, then two terms as mayor. He and his wife, Ida, had a fruit farm near town.

He was actively involved in community activities such as the Mesa County Camera Club, the Masons, and fruit-growers' organizations.

In the spring of 1915, while seeking to get the flagpole erected, Reeder also worked with Mesa County officials to survey a possible route for an automobile road through De Beque Canyon.

At the time, the auto and wagon road ran up Plateau Canyon to the De Beque Cutoff, then northwest to De Beque.

Still, he was persistent in his flag-raising effort. According to an April 7, 1915, article in the Sentinel, Reeder had 30 feet of gas pipe ready to be hauled to the cliff top for the flag pole.

"As soon as the proper conveyance is secured, he will pack cement, gravel and water to point prepared for the erection and unfurling of 'Old Glory.'"

The "proper conveyance" to haul two sections of steel pipe turned out to be horses, according to the Palisade Tribune.

But once Reeder and three other men got the lower section of pipe secured into its rock foundation, they found they couldn't raise the upper section and set it in place.

So the group hiked back to town, and recruited six more men. Those folks "joined the first group of boosters, and the job was finished by 3:00 o'clock in the afternoon," the Tribune said on May 7. Some of the people involved were believed to be members of a Boy Scout troop that Reeder led.

Three years later, Reeder attempted to resume his political career, running as the Republican for the Colorado State Senate. He lost to Democrat Ollie Bannister in the general election.

During that time, he also led the Palisade bond campaign for the war effort, continued as a Scout leader and president of a fruit-growers' group.

Meanwhile, he and his Boy Scout troop kept the flag flying.

However, by the time

Reeder died in 1939, the flagpole and flag had been long neglected. To honor the longtime civic leader, the American Legion and members of the local Boy Scouts raised a new flag on Reeder's flagpole in September of 1939.

The flag was neglected again, but was resurrected by the Boy Scouts again in 1945, and in 1950 and 1959, according to Palisade Tribune articles.

At other times, individuals such as a man named Frost Tilton kept the flag flying. In more recent decades, it has been tended to by members of the Palisade Fire Department, including former Fire Chief Richard Rupp, his father and brother, and Gardner Clymer.

Sometime during these years, problems developed with the 30-foot pole, and the top section was removed and cut. The flagpole is now about half of its original height.

Michael Kennedy came upon the flagpole and tattered flag several years ago while hiking, and he resolved to get a new flag flying.

After contacting several groups, he reached out to Riley Parker and the Sunrise Rotary Club. They agreed to assume responsibility for the Reeder flag in June of 2021.

Despite the need to regularly replace the wind-torn flag, and to provide new steel ropes, and the fact that it is a two-hour round-trip hike to the pole, the flag has been flying continuously ever since.

Sources: Historic newspapers at www.colorado-historicnewspapers.org and www.newspapers.com. Author interviews with Michael Kennedy and Riley Parker. Materials on the history of the flag prepared by Kennedy.

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IN BRIEF WIRE REPORTS

Monkeypox may be in Colorado

DENVER — A man who recently traveled to Canada may have the first confirmed case of the monkeypox virus in Colorado, state health officials said.

A lab run by the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment identified the presumptive case and is awaiting confirmation from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. State health officials say the risk to the public remains low, and the man is recovering in isolation at home.

Monkeypox often starts with a fever, headache, muscle aches, swollen lymph nodes and exhaustion, according to health officials. A rash could develop within one to three days after the onset of fever, often beginning on the face and spreading to other parts of the body. Monkeypox can spread when there is close contact with someone already infected with the virus.

Most people recover within two to four weeks without needing to be hospitalized, although monkeypox can be fatal for up to 6% of cases. Two vaccines are available to prevent the virus, and health officials in Colorado have requested doses from the federal government.

3 shot at Colorado Springs bar

COLORADO SPRINGS — Three people were shot and wounded at a bar in Colorado Springs last week, police said. The shooting happened at 11:30 p.m. on Friday at Babilonia Bar. Police found two people with gunshot wounds and evidence a third victim had left the area.

Officers helped the two people at the scene who were eventually taken to a hospital; their current conditions are unknown, police said. An investigation is ongoing.

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