

FIRST DRAFT

Eagle County ranch played significant role in state's history

High on a sandstone cliff above Interstate 70 and the Eagle River sits a massive steel wheel, some timbers and a few bits of other metal.

They are remnants from a 19th century sandstone quarry that provided sandstone blocks for building construction on Colorado's Front Range and elsewhere. The Sherwood Quarry, as it was called, is believed to have supplied sandstone for the Brown Palace Hotel in Denver.

But operation of the Sherwood Quarry was short-lived, halted not because of a slumping market or financial considerations, but by disease.

"It had started out as a rather ambitious quarrying operation, but was brought to a halt by a sudden outbreak of smallpox, in which many workmen died," wrote Eagle Valley pioneer Amy Bowen in an unpublished memoir called "Memories of Eagle County in the 1880s."

"The other workers fled, and after that nobody could be persuaded to go near the place, so the whole thing was given up," Bowen wrote.

Even so, she remembered visiting the area, and a train stop called Sherwood, as a child.

"We were always eager to see the remnants of machinery, half chiseled blocks of red sandstone etc., that marked the site of an abandoned quarry."

Rupert Sherwood, a one-time miner from Park County, Colorado, brought 40 head of cattle into the Eagle Valley in 1883 and homesteaded a ranch along the Eagle River between Eagle and Wolcott.

When the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad pushed through the valley in 1887, it established a train stop at Sherwood's ranch that was called Sherwood.

For a while, "Sherwood was a bustling place, with a sawmill, saloon and several houses," according to a plaque placed near the site of the old community by Eagle County Open Space.

My wife Judy and I visited the Sherwood site earlier this summer with representatives of Eagle Valley Land Trust, Eagle Valley Historical Society and Eagle County Open Space, along with a small group of people interested in the site's history.

Although the old quarry site is on private land, much of the property is in a conservation easement through Eagle Valley Land Trust, and the group has an agreement with the landowner to allow guided trips to the site several times a year.

We began our hike just off U.S. Highway 6 a few miles west of Wolcott, and followed an old wagon road to the east, then cut back to the west and began climbing toward the top of the sandstone cliff. The site sits near the edge of the White River National Forest.

After hiking a little less than an hour on a relatively moderate grade, we reached remnants of the old quarrying operation.

Oliver Skelly, community conservation coordinator with Eagle Valley Land Trust, said it appears that the large



BOB SILBERNAGEL/Special to the Sentinel

An old steel wheel sits atop a cliff in Eagle County, remnants of the Sherwood Quarry, which supplied sandstone to buildings in Colorado and elsewhere. Cables connected to the wheel were used to slowly skid sandstone blocks from the quarry to the valley below.

iron wheel, which still sits atop the cliff, was used with steel cables to skid large sandstone blocks down a steep path on the side of the cliff to the valley below. They would have arrived near the railroad siding, where they could have been loaded onto train cars and shipped to building sites.

A history of Eagle County that was published in 1899 extolled the virtues of the Sherwood Quarry and another sandstone quarry near Basalt.

"These quarries have never been worked to their fullest point of production, but they have a state reputation for the excellence of their material," wrote author William McCabe.

The Sherwood Quarry, in particular, was noted for the quality of its red sandstone, McCabe wrote. And, in addition to sending sandstone to construction sites "in the larger cities of the state," he said the Sherwood Quarry "has shipped stone as far east as Chicago."

The Brown Palace received national attention in an article in Scientific American magazine in May, 1892 — the same year the Brown Palace opened. The article touted what was then a unique construction method.

Unlike older buildings in which the rock or brick structure supported the weight of the building, the Brown Palace used a building skeleton of iron girders and steel beams to support the building. The steel was covered with a stone façade, and the building was said to be virtually fireproof.

However, the Scientific American article also said the façade of the Brown Palace was made of "Platte Cañon pink granite" and "Arizona brownstone," a statement repeated by later publications.

Despite what that article said about the origins of the sandstone used at the Brown Palace, early area residents such as Amy Bowen recalled that stone from the Sherwood Quarry went to the Brown Palace.

Kathy Heicher, with the Eagle County Historical Society, said historians for the Brown Palace hotel confirmed to her that the red sandstone blocks of the building came from Wolcott.

However, the quarry closed and, in the early 20th century, Rupert



EAGLE COUNTY PLAQUE AT ENTRANCE TO HORN RANCH

Ranch owner Leonard Horn and his horse straddled a gap on the sandstone cliff above the Eagle Valley not far from the site of the Sherwood Quarry.



Cover of a book about the Brown Palace Hotel, showing how the building looked shortly after it opened in Denver in 1892.

Sherwood abandoned Eagle County and returned to Park County, having sold his ranch.

The Denver & Rio Grande renamed the railroad stop as "Kent," although the exact reason for the name is unclear. It housed a 22-man section crew in a bunkhouse there.

William Flynn was the section boss for the 11-mile section of track. He and his wife, Catherine, raised seven children in the one-bedroom section house.

After her husband died from complications caused by a railroad spike that struck his leg, Catherine was hired as cook for the section crew and the family was allowed to remain in the section house near the river.

On top of the cliff above that site, a short hike to the west from the iron wheel took us to another part of the cliff, made famous by rancher Leonard Horn.

Horn purchased most of what had been the Sherwood property in 1931 and raised cattle and quarter horses on the ranch until his death in 1985.

Horn was involved in Colorado politics, was on

a first-name basis with governors and senators, and worked tirelessly on behalf of the state's cattlemen.

He also was known as an accomplished horseman who delighted crowds at horse shows and fairs by riding and maneuvering his horses without bridles. Articles about him appeared in several stockman's publications.

Horn also posed several times with his horse straddling a gap in the sandstone rock high above the valley below. As someone who has ridden horses most of my life, I still get queasy when I view photos of Horn's equestrian daring-do.

Later, several churches held sunrise Easter services near the same spot.

The Horn Ranch, as it is now called, provides a unique insight into several eras of Colorado and Eagle County history. And the hike to visit the site is well worth the effort. Guided group hikes are usually conducted in the early summer and the fall.

Those interested in joining a hike should contact Eagle Valley Land Trust info@evlt.org, or Eagle County Historical Society at ECHS@eagle-countyhistoricalsociety.com.

Sources: "Memories of Eagle County in the 1880s," by Amy M. Bowen, courtesy of Eagle County Historical Society; "The Brown Palace Story," by Corinne Hunt; "Iron and Steel in Large Buildings," Scientific American, May 21, 1892; "The Horn Ranch," plaque along U.S. Highway 6 east of Eagle, Colo.; interviews with Kathy Heicher, Eagle County Historical Society and Oliver Skelly, Eagle Valley Land Trust.

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IN BRIEF WIRE REPORTS

Missing boater's body recovered

LOVELAND — Authorities said a man died after reportedly falling into the water while boating on a lake in northern Colorado.

The Loveland Reporter-Herald reports the man fell into Westerdoll Lake about 8:30 p.m. Thursday, and a dive team recovered his body about an hour and a half later.

Tom Hacker, a spokesman for the Loveland Police Department, said someone came ashore in a two-person boat and reported that the man was missing in the water. The victim's name, age and hometown have not been released. Loveland police are investigating the death.

Pioneer Day recognizes settlers

SALT LAKE CITY — People in Utah gathered to celebrate the state's history and recognize early Mormon pioneers who trekked west in search of religious freedom.

Pioneer Day is a beloved only-in-Utah holiday every July 24 that features parades, rodeos, fireworks and more. The festivities were canceled last year because of the pandemic.

Hundreds of people camped and staked out spots along the parade route in downtown Salt Lake City.

Pioneer Day marks the date in 1847 when Brigham Young and other Mormon pioneers, many pulling handcarts, ended their treacherous journey across the country from Illinois to the Salt Lake Valley.

Arrest made in woman's death

LOVELAND — A woman was hit and killed by a vehicle in a parking lot in Loveland and a man has been arrested, police said.

Officers responded about 11 p.m. Friday to a woman struck by a vehicle at the Orchards Shopping Center. Police say she was taken to a hospital and pronounced dead.

Timothy Sourp of Fort Collins was arrested early Saturday on suspicion of vehicular homicide, illegal possession of a weapon and domestic violence, police said.

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