

FIRST DRAFT

New Palisade History Museum moves into an historic building

George Bunte Jr. undoubtedly had business primarily in mind when he constructed the small log building that would serve as a shop for his trucking business at what's now 3740 G Road in Palisade.

Even so, the structure, built about 1939, now is more about history than commerce. This month, the new Palisade History Museum, operated by the Palisade Historical Society, opened in the old truck service building.

Still, commerce isn't ignored at the new museum.



BOB SILBERNAGEL

Visitors to the facility can view exhibits and artifacts examining the region's fruit industry, along with the history and importance of irrigation.

A display from the old Cameo company store shows when that small community was a coal-mining town, and how it evolved to be the site of a large electric generation plant and, more recently, a shooting range and education facility.

Other exhibits highlight the importance of coal mining in the area's history.

Another display focuses on the career of the late Wayne Aspinall, the Palisade native who was a longtime member of Congress and chairman of the House Interior Committee.

Prior to the opening of the new museum, Palisade Historical Society had been without a home for more than three years. In 2019, however, Bunte's grandson Kirk Bunte, and Kirk's wife, Cyndy, contacted the Historical Society about the possibility of leasing the old truck shop for a museum.

An agreement was reached for a long-term, low-cost lease, but first the building had to be given a face-lift and some structural improvements.

That also meant raising money, about \$130,000, according to Jaime Cox, the treasurer for the Historical Society.

Several significant donations, including from the Town of Palisade, the Bacon Family Foundation and the Goodwin Foundation, came in.

"We received nearly \$20,000 in in-kind donations," added Priscilla Walker, chairperson of the Historical Society.

They included construction assistance from Whitewater Building Materials Corp., electrical work and more from the late-Gary Rupp of Palisade, who died earlier this year. Russ Bell of Palisade provided plumbing and other construction assistance.

In addition, Walker said, one local family provided storage for the museum's archived material for several years, while another woman assisted with graphic arts to set up displays and other printed materials.

Jaime Cox, who is also an architect and a Palisade businesswoman, redesigned the 1,000-square-foot building so it could serve as a museum.

"My favorite part of any project is seeing what you can make out of something. Give it a new life," Cox said recently. "Any time you open up a wall or an old building, you never know what you'll find, but for the most part, we knew the Bunte building would require a lot of TLC."

That included pouring a new concrete floor and improving some of the structural elements, she said. Interior walls, drywall and lighting were also necessary for exhibit areas.

"Now the goal is to work on the exhibits to make them shine and relay the history of this area in a really palatable way," Cox said.

Work was completed with the assistance of countless volunteer hours put in by Historical Society members and board



MUSEUM OF WESTERN COLORADO'S MARIE TIPPING COLLECTION

George Bunte Jr. outside his shop in Palisade circa 1940.



BOB SILBERNAGEL/Special to the Sentinel

A cash register from the old Cameo Mercantile Co., when the town was an active mining town. In the background are photos of other coal-mining operations in the region.

members led by Walker and Cox.

In addition to the exhibits already mentioned, there are photos of the Bunte family and the truck shop as it originally appeared.

"We have remnants of some of the Bunte shop signs to put up inside," Cox said. Also, one of the original brick walls in the interior has been left exposed to offer a glimpse of how the building once appeared.

The Buntzes deserve historical recognition along with George Jr.'s one-time truck shop.

For one thing, George Jr. served as Mesa County assessor from 1966 through 1978. Previously, he was a member of the School District 51 Board of Education, and served a term as its president.

George Bunte Jr. was born in Palisade in 1911. His father, George Bunte Sr., had moved to the community a year earlier, and began growing fruit near town.

George Jr. started his trucking business in the 1930s, beginning with a single Model A Ford truck belonging to his father, he recalled decades later.

Eventually, he purchased a V-8 Ford truck and obtained contracts to haul coal throughout the valley. Over time, his business grew to include seven trucks, plus a crane and excavation equipment.

He built the truck shop next to his house along what was then the main road through Palisade. Kirk and Cyndy Bunte still own the house next to what's now the museum, and use it as a rental property.

Bunte sold the trucking business when he became county assessor.

In addition to his trucking business, George Jr. also a fruit grower like his father, and he became deeply involved in organizations related to that industry. He was a member of United Fruit Growers' Associ-



BOB SILBERNAGEL/Special to the Sentinel

The east side of the Bunte truck shop, turned Palisade History Museum, as it looks today.



BOB SILBERNAGEL/Special to the Sentinel

Priscilla Walker, chairperson of Palisade Historical Society, stands next to a unique peach harvesting bag, invented by her grandfather, George Bowman. The bag is on display at the Palisade History Museum.

ation and the Peach Board of Control.

One indication of how important the Buntzes were to the early 20th century fruit industry came in 1934.

That year George Bunte — it's not clear whether the reference was to the father or son — was one of a half-dozen men deputized by Mesa County Sheriff Charles Lumley to assist in dealing with "any labor disturbance or other trouble in the handling of the (peach) crop that may be reported," according to the Palisade Tribune for Aug. 10, 1934.

A subsequent article in the Tribune later the same month reported "Good Order and Little Trouble During Harvest."

"A few crap games were run for the first few days of the harvest in the city park and a few other places," the article said, "but the king-pins were told to lay off and they did... There was very little disturbance as compared to other harvests."

What role Bunte and the other temporary deputies played in maintaining good order during the harvest is unclear.

George Bunte Jr. was also involved in a number of community organizations, including the Palisade Lions Club, the Palisade Volunteer Fire Department and as treasurer of the Rural Fire Protection District Board.

Additionally, he was known for his excellent baritone voice. He sang at many community events, as well as weddings and funerals, and was a member of the Presbyterian Church choir for 50 years.

Bunte Jr. died in 1988. But his memory and that of his business will live on in the new Palisade Museum in the old log building he owned for many years.

The Palisade History Museum is open from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Tuesdays and Fridays. Admission is free, but donations are appreciated.

Sources: Palisade Historical Society; interviews with Jaime Cox and Priscilla Walker; The Palisade Tribune through www.coloradohistoricnewspapers.org

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THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Navajo rancher Timothy Largo and his granddaughter are overwhelmed by a cloud of dust while working at the Sims Ranch near Crownpoint, N.M.

Aid for Navajo ranchers hit by drought, pandemic on its way

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — Navajo ranchers impacted by the pandemic and ongoing drought may soon qualify for assistance to supplement their livestock with hay and grain.

The Navajo Nation Council passed legislation earlier this year to allocate \$4 million for hay, grain and livestock feed for distribution to ranchers and livestock owners through the Sihasin Fund Pasture Range and Forage Expenditure Plan.

According to Navajo Nation Council Delegate Mark Freeland, the Navajo Nation is now in the process of developing a mechanism to disburse the money to the chapters and help the ranchers. Many are struggling as a result of the drought.

Several slaughter facilities in the U.S. were closed, causing market prices to go down. Ranchers are being advised to keep track of their losses and expenses and reduce the number of livestock under a plan to restock or defer operations.

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