

FIRST DRAFT

Court declares John Otto sane in 1908

John Otto was not insane, and he had a court decree to prove it.

A Mesa County jury declared Otto sane on Feb. 24, 1908, despite the apparent disbelief of the unnamed Daily Sentinel reporter who covered the case.

After reporting the jury's verdict, the reporter wrote, "There is no question in the minds

of a majority familiar with the circumstances that Otto is at least not strong mentally."

The question of Otto's sanity had been a recurring issue in the years before he became a tireless advocate for what is today Colorado National Monument.

He spent six months in an insane asylum in California before moving to Colorado in 1903. He was arrested in Denver later that year, then spent time in jail in Mesa County before the six-man jury ruled on his sanity.

In all these cases, it was Otto's propensity for making long, often incoherent statements to and about government officials that made people question his mental stability.

Before he turned his attention to the landscape then known as Monument Canyon, Otto expressed his views on everything from miners' rights to women's suffrage.

His arguments about the benefits of volunteerism — "Better than money," he said — led to his first incarceration in Humboldt County, California, in September 1902.

After venting his views, he left a store without paying his bill, and he was later arrested by a sheriff's deputy. But it was his strange view on money, and his rants on other political issues, that sent him to the state hospital at Napa.

While there, Otto wrote lengthy, rambling letters to California Gov. George Pardee, despite efforts of hospital officials to censor his writing.

In the spring of 1903, he was quietly released, and soon thereafter he showed up in Colorado.

But once again, his sometimes incoherent writings and political views landed him in hot water.

Labor unrest hit Colorado in 1903, with strikes closing mines and mills in Cripple Creek, Colorado City and Telluride.

Otto worked at mines in Grand, Eagle and Lake counties, and visited Denver frequently. In October 1903, he wrote his first letter to Colorado Gov. James Peabody



John Otto, shown with his pack mules, devoted his attentions after 1908 to building trails in then-Monument Canyon and on working with local officials to win protection of the red-rock canyons he loved.

MUSEUMS OF WESTERN COLORADO/Special to the Sentinel

John Otto spent six months in an insane asylum in California before moving to Colorado in 1903. He had strange views on money and often ranted on political issues.

regarding the strikes.

When there was no response to his first letter, he bombarded the governor with more, which were viewed by state officials as the writings of a "crank." A Pinkerton National Detective Agency operative was assigned to keep tabs on Otto.

In November, Otto "demanded" to see Peabody to discuss Otto's plans for settling labor issues.

"I want no trifling," he added. "You have got to settle it the way I say or there will be trouble, I warn you."

That was enough to convince Peabody and his advisers that Otto was not harmless, according to Alan Kania's book, "John Otto: Trials and Trails."

The governor invited Otto to visit him on Nov. 14. But Peabody was not there.

Instead, Denver police officers immediately arrested Otto. They found pages of newspaper clippings and Otto's own writings in his pockets, along with a sharpened candlestick that they viewed as a weapon.

Otto later said it was sharpened so that he could stick it in window sills where he stayed.

He was booked into the Denver County Jail, protesting he had done nothing wrong. Denver reporters wrote that

Otto declared himself "an ideal Socialist," but no anarchist. He called for the formation of a grand jury to indict members of the Colorado Legislature who helped kill a bill to enact an eight-hour work day, but he said little about the governor.

Peabody argued Otto was insane and should be sent to an asylum, in part as a warning to other "cranks." But later, he said he would not file charges against Otto, who "may mean no harm to anyone."

Otto was released from the Denver jail roughly a week after his arrest.

His activities the next three years are unclear. By 1906, he was in Mesa County, employed on a project to bring water from Piñon Mesa to Fruita. He undoubtedly got his first glimpse of Monument Canyons then, and began to spend much of his time there.

The 1908 sanity hearing came after Otto made more rash statements. Then-Gov. Henry Buchtel was scheduled to speak in Fruita that month. But Otto, convinced that Buchtel had bought his election and was no friend of labor, declared he would get all the dynamite in Fruita and "celebrate" a political "revelation."

When he made similar state-

ments at the office of a Fruita doctor, the sheriff was called and Otto was arrested.

Once again, his sanity was questioned. But this time, Otto appeared calm during the hearing. The jury found him sane and "therefore, not chargeable with being a lunatic," the Sentinel reported.

When Otto was released from jail shortly after the hearing, the doctor who observed him declared Otto was "on the high road to recovery."

After his release, Otto devoted his attentions to building trails in Monument Canyon and on working with local officials to win protection of the red-rock canyons he loved.

That occurred in 1911, when President William Howard Taft designated the area Colorado National Monument. Otto became its first superintendent. He worked there for 16 years before moving back to California. He died in Yreka, California, in 1952.

Long after his final insanity hearing, Otto carried his court release papers with him to show others. According to Kania, "He realized he was the only person in Mesa County who could prove he was sane. He found that most satisfying."

Information for this column came from "John Otto: Trials and Trails," by Alan J. Kania; from The Daily Sentinel archives; the Museum of Western Colorado and the Colorado National Monument website.

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2016 THIS WEEK IN THE LEGISLATURE

This week the two parties will be caucusing for presidential candidates and statewide candidates on Tuesday, meaning the Legislature won't be doing much that day.

■ **Today:** The House Education Committee will hear HB1178 that would give Native Americans, no matter where they live in the nation, lower in-state tuition rates to colleges and universities in Colorado.

■ **Wednesday:** The Senate State, Veterans & Military Affairs Committee will hear HB1111 that would place a ballot measure before voters to approve a constitutional amendment requiring photo identification to register to vote on or immediately prior to Election Day.

■ **Thursday:** The Senate Education Committee will hear SB104, a measure designed to encourage more teachers to teach at rural schools.

■ **Next week:** A Senate committee will hear a bill dealing with allowing off-highway vehicles to travel on roads, while the House will hear a measure that would ban law enforcement from using chokeholds.

Scheduled committee hearings are subject to change. All floor action and committees can be watched or heard on the Legislature's website at www.leg.state.co.us. Check that website to see which measures are available for remote testimony, and how to register to speak.

— Charles Ashby

'We have to take the handcuffs off energy,' says strategic planner

By GARY HARMON
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Unshackle the United States' domestic energy industry, a retired Air Force general and strategic planner said Friday.

Lt. Gen. Thomas McInerney spoke Friday to students at Colorado Mesa University and The Daily Sentinel editorial board.

America's economy and military are handcuffed, McInerney said, by high taxes and over-regulation. Freeing up energy development would do much to deal with both economic doldrums and military weakness, he said.

"The Saudis want us out of business," McInerney said, referring to continuing oil production in the Middle East that is driving down prices and pressuring American companies

to remain in the market. "You don't understand that you are on the Titanic."

The U.S. could combat the doldrums by reducing the corporate income tax from 35 percent to 15 or 20 percent to encourage companies to invest in projects in the United States, McInerney said.

Business in general is over-regulated, hindering productivity and competitiveness, McInerney said.

That's particularly true for oil and gas, and the stress is taking its toll, McInerney said.

"The tipping point is here right now and nobody is talking about it," McInerney said. "We have to take the handcuffs off energy."

People caught in bear spray test

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

LOGAN, Utah — People exiting a theater Saturday night were caught in a bear spray experiment emanating from a nearby apartment.

Jamey Doshier, 31, found a can of pressurized bear spray in the garbage at his apartment, about 100 feet away from the Lewiston Theater.

Cache County Sheriff's Office Lt. Mike Peterson says Doshier sprayed the can in the air to satisfy his curiosity as to how it worked.

The lingering spray forced people back into the theater lobby. The spray causes coughing as well as burning in the nose and eyes.

The Daily Sentinel (ISSN 1445-8962)
Published every morning at 734 S. Seventh Street, Grand Junction, CO 81501.
Periodical Postage paid at Grand Junction, CO.
Carrier home delivery prices: 13 weeks - \$65.00, 26 weeks - \$130.00, 52 weeks - \$260.00.
Weekend delivery packages: Wednesday thru Sunday - \$244.40, Friday thru Sunday - \$197.60, Saturday & Sunday - \$163.80, Sunday only - \$163.80.
Weekend delivery includes the following date in 2016: Nov 24.
Single Copy: \$1.00 daily and \$2.00 Sunday.
Mail (USPS): \$5.00 per week, \$260.00 per year. *POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Daily Sentinel, P.O. Box 668, Grand Junction, CO 81502.*

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Guv to endorse Superfund zone for mines

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

DENVER — Colorado Gov. John Hickenlooper is expected to take a key step today toward launching a federally funded cleanup of 48 old mining sites in the San Juan Mountains, formally endorsing a Superfund zone that includes a mine that sent wastewater into rivers in three states last August.

The Environmental Protection Agency would oversee the project but won't proceed without the blessing of the governor and local officials. San Juan

County and the town of Silverton endorsed the cleanup last week.

"The governor has always said he would support the wish of local communities, and they reached a consensus on requesting Superfund designation," Hickenlooper spokeswoman Kathy Green said Sunday. "We are working on the final details now."

The EPA asked for Hickenlooper's response by today. Green said it would come this morning.

The EPA inadvertently trig-

gered the release of 3 million gallons of wastewater from the inactive Gold King Mine on Aug. 5 during preliminary cleanup work.

The spill polluted the Animas and San Juan rivers in Colorado, New Mexico and Utah with metals including arsenic, cadmium, copper, lead, mercury, nickel and zinc. Water utilities briefly shut down their intake valves and farmers stopped drawing from the affected rivers.

Hundreds of southwestern Colorado mines have been leak-

ing acid wastewater into rivers for decades. The EPA had proposed a Superfund cleanup before, but the idea attracted little or no support from local residents who feared it would hurt the tourist-dependent economy. They also worried it would drag on for years and depress property values.

After the Gold King spill, many residents concluded that only a Superfund designation would provide the millions of dollars needed. EPA approval of the site could come in a matter of months.

BLOTTER COMPILED BY SENTINEL STAFF

Impaired driver suspected

On Feb. 25, deputies responded to reports of a woman walking around the 2900 block of North Avenue looking confused and searching for her car.

The woman allegedly took prescription medication and subsequently drove her vehicle.

She was arrested on suspicion of driving under the influence of drugs and taken to the Mesa County Sheriff's Office.

According to the Grand Junction Police Department:

■ Noah Sargent, 29, was arrested on Feb. 24 on suspicion of theft and trespassing after being contacted by deputies in the 1100 block of North Avenue.

Sargent was released on a summons and arrested five hours later on suspicion of trespassing in the 1000 block of North Avenue. He was again released on a summons.

■ Corey Lavertve, 30, was arrested on suspicion of violating a protection order at Pitkin Avenue and South 14th Street. He was

booked into the Mesa County Jail.

According to the Mesa County Sheriff's Office:

■ Cory Shelton, 36, was arrested in the 400 block of Shire Drive on Feb. 26 on suspicion of weapons-related offenses and child abuse.

■ Deputies responded Feb. 26 to reports of a fight in the 100 block of Laura Avenue. Jonathan Blanchette, 24, was arrested on suspicion of domestic-related phone obstruction and driving with his license suspended.

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The Countdown Starts at Dare To Care Auto Repair!

Dear Dare to Care customers, I very much appreciate all of you and hope you all join our DTC family. But due to the business climate in America driving up costs we **MUST** change. So... On April 1st, Dare to Care Auto Repair **WILL** shut down to the public and become the **FIRST 'Members Only' Auto Repair Club**. The benefits of a club are untouchable for our Members. You are welcome to sign up anytime **BEFORE** March 31, 2016 (benefits start 4-1-2016). All Members who signed up last March will simply renew this March. If you choose to attend other shops, I want to say "Thank You" once again for your past business. Mike Bambino

DON'T miss our video on daretocaregi.com
2914 North Avenue 970-245-8442

We're wearing jeans for charity at The Daily Sentinel

we've got heart!

Ask me how you can help!

The employees of *The Daily Sentinel* have joined together to adopt a local non-profit organization/charity of the month. We want to help raise awareness and badly needed funds for these organizations that are dedicated to helping people in our community.

FEBRUARY JEANS FOR CHARITY ORGANIZATION: CASA COURT APPOINTED SPECIAL ADVOCATES

CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates) represent the best interests of abused and neglected children in the courtroom and other settings. CASA volunteers are appointed by judges to ensure these children don't get lost in the overburdened legal and social service system or languish in an inappropriate group or foster home. If you would like to join with us and help this committed organization, please send your donation to **CASA**, P.O. Box 4133, Grand Junction, CO 81502 or visit their website at www.casamc.org.

In Mesa County there are 122 children in the CASA program who need a volunteer and the number grows every week. You could be their voice. Call 242-4191 to volunteer today.