

## SUPERIOR HISTORIAN

VOLUME 1, ISSUE 2

SUMMER, 2003

AUGUST, 2003



## Commission Receives Book Grant

Excitement reigned at a recent Superior Historical Commission meeting when the announcement was made that it had landed a \$25,000 grant from the Colorado Historical Society for the research, writing, and publication of a book on Superior's architectural history with the working title of Lost Superior. Historical Commission Vice Chair Doreen Ruffe wrote the proposal with the assistance of Jennifer Dunn from the Town of Superior. A committee was formed and is now meeting to plan the strategy for putting the book together. The intention is for the book to focus on buildings of Superior's past that are now gone along with reminiscences from long time Superior residents and folks who lived in the town in years past. Another goal is to have the book published and available in time for the celebration of the centennial of the incorporation of the Town of Superior back in 1904. This is a challenging and thrilling task and anyone who would like to help with this project is cordially invited to do so. Please contact Doreen Ruffe at 720-304-6191 or Jennifer Dunn at 303-499-3765.

## Life in the Industrial Mine Camp

The undated photograph included above is a popular picture of old Superior and will be the topic of this issue. The Superior Historian will point out and explain some of the important and intriguing items in the picture and put the sites in modern perspective. In the right center of the picture is the Industrial Mine begun by William C. Hake and Jim Hood in 1892 and later sold to Rocky Mountain Fuel Company which operated the mine until its closing in 1945. Rising above the boiler house are three smoke stacks, two visible in the photo. To the left of the boiler house are the shaft house and the vertical bridge like structure known as a tippie. The coal was sorted and sized then moved along the tippie by conveyor and eventually dropped down into waiting railroad freight cars on its north side or trucks on the east side. The scene in the picture is west of today's McCaslin Boulevard on the hillside south of Coal Creek. The huge piles of rubble and mine waste seen in the photo are still evident today and the site of the mine camp is to the west of the mine dumps.

The residential buildings in the picture made up what was known as the Industrial Mine Camp. All the buildings in the foreground of the photo were owned by the Rocky Mountain Fuel Company and rented out to the miners. The large, two story white building stands out in contrast to the small, four room houses. This impressive edifice is the boarding house that provided rooms for unmarried miners. When Violet Bednar Gardner was growing up in Superior, she remembers working for the proprietor of the boarding house. One of her jobs was making the miner's lunches and packing the meal into their tin pails. Violet also recalls that the miners went to the Superior train depot to hop the Interurban for Denver in order to go the big city for some excitement on the weekends.



Genevieve "Genny" Acklin Crawford and Denzil Acklin in front of their mine camp house in 1937

To the left but out of our picture was the bathhouse where miners showered after their eight-hour shift. The hot water for the bathhouse came from the boiler house via underground pipes. The miners kept a change of clothes in the bathhouse so that once they showered they put on the everyday clothes and left their work overalls hanging on a hook, which was then raised up out of the way for the next shift of miners and their belongings. Herb Morrison, who spent his childhood in Superior, tells that his father preferred the privacy of bathing at home in a zinc tub filled with water heated on the stove.

Near the boarding house, then, were upwards of twenty company houses in which miners and their families lived a simple but arduous life style and paid seven dollars per month to Rocky Mountain Fuel for the privilege. There was no plumbing in the houses and noticeable in the photo are the numerous outbuildings that were divided into outhouse toilet and coal shed. Denzil Acklin, who lived in the mine camp in the 1930's and 1940's, recalls that his family's privy was a "two holer" and, therefore, a pretty classy one.

The houses did have running water – just cold – that was piped into the kitchen sink from good, deep wells that never ran out of water according to Denzil, which is a observation that is surprising given how Superior's water problems had evolved by the 1990's. The hot water for the family's Saturday night bath came from a water tank heated by the coal stove. By the way, it is quite ironic that in a coal camp next to a coal mine, the families had to buy their coal from the company! Denzil also remembers his father had a garden that kept them supplied with homegrown vegetables. To Denzil life in the camp was good. He recalls that "We were poor, but we didn't know any better because everybody else was poor too."

In the foreground of the picture are two irrigation ditches used by area farmers. As the accompanying photo shows, the ditches also provided recreation for kids of the mine camp. The upper ditch or "Big Ditch," was the one used for the wading, splashing and something resembling swimming that we see in the picture. This is an old snapshot taken by Violet Bendar Gardner in her youth which shows her on the hillside watching over her cousins whom we see splashing in the ditch. She said the "swimmers" would also "ride the current" of the slow flowing irrigation ditch, plus it was just a good place to cool off on a hot summer's day. The photo shows a simpler time when children might not have had much in a material sense, but who were able to find creative paths for enjoyment. In her reminiscence of those days, it is the simple pleasures that stand out in Violet's memory. She and her family and friends made up games and found ways to enjoy themselves even when times were tough in a hardscrabble mine-owned company town.

After the mine closed in 1945, the mine camp houses were

sold off and moved to other locations. Some are in Superior, Louisville and Lafayette and one can be seen today on Huron Street south of State Highway 7 near Interstate 25. There are signs of the camp still evident today, mostly some scattered bricks, rough foundation sites and scant remnants of mine structures. In contrast, for those who lived in the mine camp, the memories are abundant and eloquent.



Violet Bednar with cousins in the Big Ditch, Industrial Mine Camp, 1930's

#### Superior Historical Commission

Chair — Errol Waligorski 303-499-1657  
 Vice Chair — Doreen Ruffe  
 Secretary — Karen Waligorski  
 Treasurer — Bob Morgan  
 Superior Historian Editor — Larry Dorsey

#### Recent Donations to Superior Historical Commission

**Alice Morrison** donated an original abstract of a property in Superior, which is in pristine condition and an excellent resource; she also donated an old text book on ancient history once used in the Superior school.

**Ted and Marge Asti** made a cash contribution in the name of Ted's sister Josephine Zancanelli who passed away last spring. Many thanks go out to these and other people for their generosity. The Commission is happy to accept similar donations.

#### In Memoriam

The Historical commission is sad to report the loss of one of its members, Genevieve "Genny" Acklin Crawford, featured on page one of this newsletter, who passed away on July 17, 2003. She was a bright light over the past few years and will be greatly missed by many.

Thanks for this newsletter go to Denzil Acklin, Violet Bednar Gardner, Bob Morgan and Herb Morrison, for their accounts of life in the Mine Camp.