News from the Museum

As many of you may have noticed, the Quarterly Membership Meetings of the Rio Blanco County Historical Society have not been scheduled. Our members are just too precious to take any risks. We have now tabled two meetings for 2020. We will see how the next few months go with COVID 19 Restrictions. If you are currently on the membership list, you will receive a written notice of the meeting.

Our Museum Manager, Libby Morton decided after staying home while the museum was shut down for most of March, April and May, that she really wanted to retire. After some deliberation, the board decided that to hire an Executive Director. The Executive Director position was refined to include some of the functions previously being managed by the President and Treasurer with those of the Museum Manager.

The position was listed in early June, and a candidate was selected at the end of June. Teresa R. Reed, the President of the Board, resigned her position as President and accepted the position as Executive Director at the June 30th meeting. The Museum is now open 9 to 5 Monday through Saturday and 12 to 5 on Sunday. Staffed by Claude Wood, Kathy Thorsby, Teresa Reed and maybe a volunteer or two. Drop on by and say "Hello."

The Rio Blanco County Historical Society Board will continue to meet on the last Tuesday of the month at 5:45. If you would like to attend this meeting by phone or Zoom please contact the Museum at 970-878-9982. We will send you meeting access. You can also make a request to be on the agenda.

Phillips Pack Saddle History

The testing of pack saddles for the purpose of replacing the cumbersome and crude Aparejo in combat organizations were started in 1908 when the War Department equipped one squad of each Machine Gun Platoon with the English Pack Saddle and one squad with the Aparejo. The tests covered a period of three years. Neither type of saddle was satisfactory, but much valuable information was obtained as a result of these tests. The end of these tests was the starting point in the development of the Phillips Pack Saddle.

The need for a suitable pack saddle was keenly felt when our troops entered Mexico in 1916 and again when the World War came upon us. With the great increase in the number of modern weapons of war, machine gun and machine rifle units; radio, wire and other signal packs; demolition and pioneer packs, kitchen and other troop packs, there developed the need for a pack saddle which would enable pack animals to accompany cavalry at all gaits as well as a saddle suitable for cargo at slower gaits. Pack transportation at Cavalry gaits was recognized as a different and bigger problem than pack transportation at the pack train gaits of amble and walk.

World War I demonstrated the need for equipment simple in design, that could be used by National Army troops with a short period of training. Practically all standard types of foreign pack saddles and American types were tested by boards of the several services.

Further tests of pack equipment begin in earnest in 1919 upon the return of our troops from France. The The Phillips Pack Saddle, as designed by Lt. Col. Albert E. Phillips of the Cavalry, won each of the service tests in which this saddle was entered. The Infantry test was conducted by the Infantry School at Camp Benning in 1920.

The Mountain Artillery test was conducted by the Pack Artillery Board, 4th Artillery, in 1922-23, and consisted of over five hundred miles of marching. Three separate tests were conducted in the Cavalry by the 1st Cavalry Division, covering eleven hundred and fifty miles of marching, in each of which the Phillips Saddle won first place. As a final result of all tests, the Phillips Pack Saddle was adopted for the Cavalry service on July 26, 1924.

The Phillips pack saddle was so heavy that it required two men to lift it into place. Yet it was a marvel which could be used for long distance travel, during which time the pack animals suffered few if any injuries. Not
only did it not injure pack animals, if turned upside down and covered with canvas, a dozen of the buoyant saddles could be turned into an emergency boat. Nevertheless, the US army disposed of all these valuable pack saddles at the conclusion of the Second World War. As a result of this short-sighted decision, when the Pentagon dispatched the modern US army to Afghanistan, the soldiers were forced to revert to the primitive Sawbuck pack saddle used by their 19th century ancestors.

By Claude Wood

In the White River Museum, Room 5, is a horseshoe-shaped wreath made up of intricate patterns and three-dimensional floral designs. This intertwined hair is from many of the relatives of Mrs. Mary Hopkins. The custom of creating Mourning Wreath's seems macabre today, but the Victorian's took the idea and created an art form. It became very popular as a human artistic memorial because hair is one the most personal mementos and physical remnants that one can share. A hair wreath was a way of telling about the family and its' history-like a family tree. The "hey-day" for this practice was 1850-1880 in Europe and America during the Victorian era. Hair was not only used in wreaths. It was often woven into bracelets, earrings, brooches, watch fobs, and buttons. These were worn during the mourning period after the death of a loved one and later in remembrance. This was considered a sentimental and fashionable way for our ancestors to keep close a piece of a loved one. These creations live on today in personal collections and museums. Including the one featured above at the White River Museum.

By Kathy Thorsby

Spaghetti with Pork Chops

By Phil Pryke from the Recipe from the Meeker Cookbook

3 Tbs. Butter
3 Tbs. Olive oil
2 cloves garlic, pressed
¼ tsp. pepper
1/8 tsp. crushed red pepper
1 tsp. rosemary, ground
4-6 pork chops, 1" thick
1 large can tomatoes, chopped (Save the juice)
½ lb. spaghetti
½ tsp. salt
4 Tbs. Butter

4 Tbs. Parmesan cheese
Melt butter with olive oil in large skillet. Add garlic, pepper, and red pepper. Sprinkle Rosemary on pork chops, then brown slowly in the skillet. Add tomatoes, parsley, and salt. Cover and cook slowly for 20 minutes. Uncover and cook an additional 20 minutes or until tender. Cook the spaghetti, drain and toss butter and Parmesan cheese. Add ½ cup of the sauce mixture to the spaghetti. Place spaghetti on a hot platter, arrange the chops on top and pour sauce over all.

Letters from History

The following is an excerpt from a letter found in a handbag written to the late Clara Johnson Ruckman by her father George Johnson residing in Emporia, VA...

Dear Clara,

It is cloudy and rainy today. It's been that way mostly, for the past two weeks. The garden we planted about a month ago isn't doing very much. Peas, onion sets and radishes, are trying to come up, but it's too cold for them to do any good. We have some small flowering shrubs on this place, the reason they are small is that this is a new or practically new house, the older homes have the same kind but larger, anyway they are in bloom, ours and everybody else's. There are also within sight, pears, peaches plums etc., all in blossom. There are lots of birds here now such as mocking birds, blue birds, jays, cardinals, cat birds, orioles, and scarlings, and assorted warblers, wrens, and always the crows are cawing.

We spent the week end at Lynchburg visiting at the Robert Hollis, and other of the kinfolk. At all of these different places they had these same flowering shrubs that I mentioned above. And I asked them what they were called? Asked about 200 people not one could tell me. Imagine several generations of people living in one place, with trees flowers and shrubs surrounding them on all sides since time immemorial and not becoming curious as to what it was that was doing the surrounding. They just don't seem to care, me I must be an odd sort of snoopy guy. I just can't help it. See how much happier these folks are, going along in their carefree way, never questioning never asking, always accepting, never doubting or trying to find out. For them life can be beautiful...but they don't know what makes it beautiful. If nature had instead of endowing them with all these blessing, just given them a mixture of cockleburs, cactus and skunks life would still be beautiful I suppose...it's not for me to say.... (To Be Continued)

Old West Heritage Culture Center continues to be open and available to the community. To reserve the facility, you must fill out an Agreement at the Museum. If you are a member of the Rio Blanco County Historical Society or a local non-profit there is no charge for using the Center but you are still liable for damages. Anyone can use the room for a $25.00 fee. Call 970-878-9982 for questions or reservations.