TO THE MEMBERSHIP

Happy New Year!

I hope this letter finds everyone in good health and you had a wonderful holiday season.

We are looking forward to the coming year. It is an exciting one as Old Max celebrates its 150th year!! Talk about a milestone for our community. We hope to have some kind of special celebration if we can.

Come in and check out the gift shop; we are always getting new items. Also, a newly acquired item for the museum is the ladder from the last escape at Territorial Correctional Facility from a couple years ago.

Cheers to the new year. Let’s hope life gets back to something at least a little bit like normal in 2021. We hope to see everyone soon.

Maureen Sheridan, Chairman

“您 are never too old to set another goal or to dream a new dream.”

- C. S. Lewis
In Memoriam

In memory of deceased Board Member Donna Murphy, the County Commissioners have posthumously named Donna Murphy as this year’s “Outstanding Civic Leader of Fremont County”.

“Donna was a volunteer and spearheader of many local non-profits. She was an avid environmentalist always working toward the improvement of our quality of life. She was willing to sacrifice her time, money, energy, and comfort to make sure our community was a better and safer in which to live.

Donna had been an officer or active member of The Rialto Theater, Fremont Center for the Arts, Fremont/Custer Historical Society, the Museum of Colorado Prisons, the Sierra Club, BLM Resource Advisory Council, Arkansas Headwaters Recreation Area’s Citizen Task Force, Fremont/Valdai Sister City Association, Fremont Economic Development Corporation, Community Advisory Group for the Cotter Corp. superfund mill site, The Jane Jeffersons, The Italian Festival, The Cousteau Society, and Cañon City’s Energy Future. She also was a regional representative on Gov. Roy Romer’s “Smart Growth” forums and a founding member of Colorado Citizens Against Toxic Waste.

- Stacey Cline

A more complete description of Donna’s life was written in the Canon City Daily Record on July 3, 2020 by Carie Canterbury.

In recognition of almost twenty years of heartfelt contributions and leadership, the Museum of Colorado Prisons is offering its membership an opportunity to participate in erecting a large stone memorial and plaque on Museum grounds in honor of Donna Murphy.
If you would like to participate, please send your contribution to Donna’s Memorial, c/o Museum of Colorado Prisons, 201 North 1st St., Canon City, CO 81212

If you have any questions call Stacey at 269-3019.
Ida Mercer’s occupation was listed as a music teacher. Ida and her daughter Arline lived in Denver, apparently happily, until the daughter married Carl Gregersen, a Denver Tramway motorman. Something which may have caused some ill feelings was the fact that Arline and Carl were married in Goodland, Kansas, by Probate Judge Shay, on July 16, 1912.

Research is sadly lacking as to the actual reason Ida murdered her son-in-law. One newspaper dated May 7, 1914, is very vague and lacking in detail. In one long run-on sentence the journalist gives us a possible clue:

“That the overpowering love of a mother for her only child prevented her from becoming reconciled to the entry of a third person into their lives was the direct cause leading up to the killing of Carl Gregersen, Tramway motorman, by his mother-in-law, Mrs. Ida Mercer, in Denver, is the belief of the police, based on a dispassionate investigation of events in the lives of the principals since the marriage of Gregersen to the woman’s daughter.”

So, we are left to speculate. Was Carl a philanderer? Did Arline complain to her mother about being unhappy? Was Carl an abusive husband? Did Ida drop in for a visit and find her daughter with bruises? Was he just an ordinary man who didn’t get along with his mother-in-law? Or was Ida so filled with rage, a smoldering jealous rage, because this man had taken her daughter away from her? The paper merely indicated “a general family quarrel.”

At any rate, Ida felt perfectly justified to shoot the man. The papers reported that “after he fell she went to his body and shot him twice more.”

Public opinion at the time felt the charge of first degree murder was inappropriate, that it should have been voluntary manslaughter. However, the jury, after more than three hours of deliberation, returned a verdict of guilty with a recommendation of life in prison for the 60-year-old woman. On hearing the verdict Mrs. Mercer accepted it “very stoically” and announced she would continue her literary work in prison.

We learn a lot about Ida from her intake sheet where reprimands are recorded: 10-17-20 Impertinence and talking back to Matron; 2-19-23 Leaving cell without permission; 3-9-23 Refusing to go to cell where order for punishment was received.

In the early morning hours of December 4, 1925, Ida died in the state prison’s “Female Department” of “cerebral hemorrhage” after serving 10 ½ years--her life sentence. She was 70 years old.

Sources for this article include:
Eastern Colorado Times 5-7-1914
Fort Collins Express and Review 10-15-14
The Goodland Republic and Goodland News 10-2-14
Museum of Colorado Prisons Archives
NEW BOARD MEMBER
DAVE SHOEMAKER
(No photo available at this time)

BOARD OF DIRECTORS
FOR THE 2020-2021 YEAR
The slate of officers reads much the same as the Board from the previous year with some changes: We welcomed new member Dave Shoemaker to the Board, and as of November 17, 2020, Brendan Pardue has moved from an elected member to a position on the Advisory Board. We thank you, Brendan, for your all dedication and generosity to the Prison Museum.

Officers:
Chairman Maureen Sheridan
Vice-Chairman Malacha Hall
Secretary/Editor Paula DeCook
Treasurer Sheila Lucero

Board Members:
Jim Jacobs Dave Shoemaker
Frank Martinez Sandy McCoy

Advisory Board:
Sandy Dexter Elaine Greenlee
H. B. Johnson Dan Korber
Brendan Pardue

Members, and in fact anyone of the public, with an interest in preserving the history of the Dept. of Corrections in Colorado is welcome to attend meetings of the Board of Directors on the third Wednesdays of each month at 5:30 pm. Please call if you’d like to attend (269-3015) so we can plan for compliance with the Covid-19 restrictions. A mask will be required.

ABOUT OUR MUSEUM DURING THE COVID RESTRICTIONS:
“How We Manage to Stay Open and Learned to Love the Mask”

COVID-19 IMPACT

In October the Museum qualified for a grant from Fremont County’s “Restart Business Grant Program” through the CARES Act – Coronavirus Relief Fund. This grant was designed to reimburse businesses struggling with unexpected expense directly related to the virus restrictions, things like hand sanitizers, cleaning supplies, also insurance and utility payments for the time the business was closed or operating at reduced capacity. In the Museum’s case another big expense is copy paper. Copying and making up new tour guide booklets has become necessary because each booklet must be disposed of after use by a visitor. These are on-going expenses. Also due to the virus, visitor attendance is noticeably reduced. By submitting qualifying receipts, The Museum has been reimbursed a total of $9,638.36. Thank you, Fremont County.

Another great benefit was the Payroll Protection Program (PPP), a Federal loan program where banks can offer loans to businesses who are trying to make payroll and stay open during reduced income times owing to the Covid virus. In August, High Country Bank graciously accepted the Museum’s application and we were given $22,455. Under the terms of PPP, all monies must be used for payroll and, at the end the total would be forgiven. The loan expired October 30, 2020, any outstanding
funds not used were forgiven. We are free and clear.

Thanks go to Stacey Cline, our Administrator, for searching out and finding loans and grants, for meeting all the paperwork terms of compliance, and keeping the Museum open, for staying within the Covid-19 restrictions. Thanks also to the staff who have stepped up to the extra work involving constant cleaning and sterilizing so the building can be enjoyed by the public. The protocol limits the Museum to only 10 visitors at one time with a thorough cleaning between groups, and masks are mandatory.

The Museum was enjoyed by 2,011 visitors in September, by 1,268 in October, and by 645 in November. Keep in mind this is during a “Covid Concern--Level Yellow” added on to the usual winter slowdown in tourist activity.

So, the Museum has been able to happily struggle on through this last year. We’ve had wonderful help from our supporters and volunteers. We look forward to 2021 and whatever it has in store for us.

Thank you, 7News, for letting more people know about us.

Gold Rush Ghost Encounters gives people the experience of a Paranormal Investigator for a night. The latest event was Halloween night of 2020. For the guests who came from Colorado Springs, Pueblo, Canon City, and the five from Grand Junction, it was a memorable evening. The people who are monitors taught the guests how the equipment is used and let the guests try it out for themselves. One of the main items used is a Phasma Box. It works like a Spirit box and allows you to interact and talk with spirits. This has made many skeptics question things. People can also use the Bumble bee, a motion-activated kids’ toy. Guests asked the spirits to touch or walk by the bee to turn it on, and they did! The bee would turn on when they asked it to. Another tool used that night was a simple cat’s toy that lights up when it is touched.

We can be sure it was a night the guests will be talking about for quite a while.

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**RECENT EVENTS**

7News from Denver filmed a sequence about our Museum in October. The staff was interviewed for their stories of paranormal encounters as the program was to air just before Halloween. It was a good presentation. The film clip can be seen if you go to “the denverchannel.com/lifestyle/Museum of Colorado Prisons.”

HAPPY NEW YEAR!!
In spite of the pandemic staunching the progress of the museum, our plans for new installations and attractions continues onward. Most notably, our administrator, Stacey Cline, has been in close talks with the Colorado Department of Corrections to transfer stewardship of the Deputy Warden’s Residency directly to the care of the museum. This circa 1901 Queen Anne style home is not only storied in its own historical significance, but played stage to some very high profile events in the prison’s saga. With this invaluable addition to the foundation, we will have a dedicated research center and archive. Furthermore, efforts to keep exhibits up to date continue. We are now in possession of the contraband ladder used in the 2018 Escape Attempt, complete with information about the brazen breakout misadventure and associated paraphernalia from the prisoners themselves. Insight from museum staff who were witness to the attempt will provide a first hand point of view from the event as well, offering a one-of-a-kind perspective to a contemporary prison escape. Additionally, an exhibit showcasing the wild reality of prisoner tattoos is well underway and will become a welcome addition to the rest of the tour in the coming months. All this is only possible with the strong connection we have with our fellow members of the community. All across Colorado and the great United States, your contributions as members have allowed us to continue the determined work in preserving and cataloguing one of the most historically significant, if controversial, aspects of human history, incarceration. We urge everyone to get the word out and they too can become apart of an extraordinary piece of Colorado heritage. An old adage goes, “new year, new me”, and in the spirit of new beginnings, I wish everyone a renewed sense of hope for the coming 2021.
201 North First St.
Cañon City, CO, 81212
We are happy to announce that pre-order sales for the commemorative 150 year anniversary Old Max t-shirts are open! Known to be “Colorado’s Oldest and Best”, C.T.C.F. has been apart of our community since 1871. The storied walls of Old Max have been host to all manner of triumphs and tribulations, from ghosts to gift shops, its history gives Cañon City a certain unconventional charm. Give our museum a call, and we can reserve a shirt of your size today.

Museum of Colorado Prisons
201 N. 1st St.
Cañon City, CO, 81212

(719) 269-3015

Small – XL: $20.00
2XL – 3XL: $25.00