

# Silverton Country Historical Society

Established in 1974

Over Forty-five Years of History in the Making



Museum and Office  
428 South Water Street

## “Well, well, well!” By Fred A. Parkinson

“Well, well, well!” might have been the sarcastic utterance of a parent who has come upon a son or daughter doing something they shouldn’t. It could also be a satisfied reaction to a job well done (pun intended.) Or, perhaps the phrase is shouted excitedly by a researcher when a long-sought bit of historic minutiae is revealed. We know how that goes.....

The word “well” can take many forms. It can be used as a verb, an adverb, an adjective, or an interjection (as in the title and first line of this story.) It can also be commonly used as a noun, defined by Merriam-Webster as “a pit or hole sunk into the earth to reach a supply of water.”

It is this definition that we will deal with here. Before the advent of municipal water systems, homes and businesses without direct access to a convenient water source would often dig a well to serve their water requirements. As water systems became more common, existing wells in built-up areas began to disappear. Sometimes, they were just covered up and forgotten.

This might have been true in the case of an old well recently rediscovered. Local photographer and historian June Drake was quoted in the September 22, 1950 *Silverton Appeal-Tribune* remembering an old well from “the good old days” as he put it. This well was located under the sidewalk in front of Johnson’s Confectionary, then located at 107 N. Water Street. According to Drake, this well had an old yellow pump with a convenient tin cup attached for public use until around 1900. The unfilled well sat idle for over one hundred years until the former Obrien’s Restaurant building renovation was started in 2019. When asked about this recently, the building’s developer, Ben Johnston, remarked: “Yes, there was a huge, hand-dug well in the street in front of the building. We discovered that when we repoured the sidewalk. It opened up and we saw a fifteen-foot deep, hand-dug well. It was very impressive!” The brick-lined well contained five to eight feet of water when it was opened up. The ancient well was eventually filled in with rock by the City.



Early Silverton well on N. Water St. showing brick lining  
(Thanks to Ben Johnston for use of the photo)

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## Curator's Corner Parades and Celebrations

Everyone living in Silverton and the surrounding area knows about the annual Pet Parade and the three-day Homer Davenport Festival and Parade. But not everyone knows that Silverton has had many other parades and celebration over the years.

In 1912 the 4<sup>th</sup> of July parade included beautiful floats such as the one from the Odd Fellows (I.O.O.F.) whose building is still in use



at the corner of Main and First Street. Many of the local fraternal organizations of the time, churches, local businesses and groups of all kinds had entries in the parade. One special entry in the 1914 parade was the special group of young ladies with their decorated doll buggies. People lined the route of the parade and from several of the photos were dressed in their ‘Sunday Best’ and it looks as if it might be the entire population of Silverton. Folks could watch and



enjoy the beautifully uniformed bands, horses and buggies, as well as automobiles and of course lots of U.S. flags.



One of the events that has always interested me is that of the Chautauqua Week. In July of 1916 Silverton hosted its first Chautauqua Week. Sponsorship included many of Silverton’s first citizens including, Dr. Keene, George Hubbs, Julius Alm, R.G. Allen, Percy Brown and George Steelhammer.

What is Chautauqua Week you may ask. Circuit Chautauqua was begun in the 1870’s as part of the Chautauqua movement in New York and was named after Lake Chautauqua. It began as an adult educational movement that originally emphasized religious training but later evolved into broader educational areas.



**Site of First Chautauqua in Parkside Addition  
Bordered by Coolidge, Apple and Jerome Streets**

Silverton’s first Chautauqua Week began on July 9<sup>th</sup> and ended on July 14<sup>th</sup>. A large tent was erected on a vacant lot owned owned by Eva Coolidge in what was known as the Parkside Addition.

The files that are available at the museum also include daily programs of speakers and activities. There were concerts, lectures, plays and even an opera. It is refreshing to note that the programs show that the guest speakers were not just male but include many female presenters.

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## “Well, well, well!”

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Another well was found by accident, or *would* have been found by accident, had it not been, again, for the memory of June Drake. In 1950, a new oil tank was scheduled to be installed in the alley behind Hande Hardware, now known as the Wolf Building. As excavation began, Drake was on hand to report the digging would soon break through into an old bricked-in well with a unique history. According to Drake, the well was dug in 1891 by John Ludowitz to provide water for Adolph Wolf’s new commercial building. Before the city water system was built, Wolf had a hot air pump installed that forced water from the well up to a 2,000-gallon water tank on the roof, capped with a distinctive cupola and weather vane that was a city landmark for several decades. The tank provided a gravity-fed water supply to his new building on Main Street as well as to his residence on North Water Street near the corner of North Water and “A” Streets. After the city water system was constructed, the well and water tank were no longer needed. The well was then covered and abandoned. The cupola and weather vane were removed in 1933 due to safety concerns. They were later recreated, based on vintage photographs, and installed in the original rooftop location during the Wolf Building’s restoration in the early 2000s.

Abandoned wells could be a hazard leading to potential injury or loss of life. This situation was averted in 1938 at a playground across from Eugene Field School used for driver training under the state-sponsored Safety Driving School. Three weeks after the playground was first used by students learning to drive, Maxine Oeder was backing her vehicle when one wheel dropped through to reveal a long boarded-over well opening. According to a newspaper account, the well had been dug around 75 years earlier. With the passage of time, the wood had rotted away, leaving only a one-foot-thick covering of earth to hide the dangerous opening. The well was estimated to be 40 to 50 feet deep. The April 22, 1938 *Silverton Appeal-Tribune* emphasized the potential dangers of the newly discovered well by reporting: “A group of young people suddenly converging on the spot during the excitement of rough and tumble play might just as easily have weakened the earth as did the car, it was said. The playground has been used for various sports at all times.” The well was soon filled in, averting any further risk to students.

Another old well seemed to hit home... our museum home, that is. As related in the “What’s happening at the Museum” column in the June 26, 1975 *Silverton Appeal-Tribune*, a home once occupied by the Fischer family, owner of the adjacent Fischer’s Flouring Mills, stood on the site of our museum. While space for museum footings was being dug in 1975, a 20-foot-deep well containing clear water was unearthed. Apparently, the well came up on the side porch of the Fischer house, making it very convenient to use. The house is faintly shown in the blurry background of a real photo postcard showing the mill next to it. The house was later moved to the corner of North Second and “A” Streets and is still standing today.

The technology to sink a well for utilizing needed water is thousands of years old. During Silverton’s early years, many residents had wells dug on their property to provide for their needs. While these wells have virtually disappeared from the Silverton city landscape, they remain essential to serve the needs of those living in the country. How many abandoned wells are still left undiscovered in Silverton? Only time will tell.



***Homer Davenport Festival Dime Toss Booth Info on Page 5!***

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### Curator Corner Parades and Celebrations

Each day of the week was divided into three sessions. The first session began at 9:00 and involved the young people of the area. The afternoon session began at 2:30 for which many of the local business closed to allow their employers to attend. The evening session began at 7:30 p.m. The fees ranged from 15 cents to 75 cents per session, with the more expensive fees being charge for the evening sessions. (Source: Fred Parkinson research file.)



Silverton City Fair 1930's

Some of the long-forgotten parades and celebrations that were held in Silverton also include the Silverton City Fair held in the 1930's and Silverton's Fruit show which was held sometime between 1911 and 1920.



We still have the Pet Parade and Homer Davenport Days Parade but I think it will be a long time coming when we bring back the Silverton Fruit Show.

*Judy Lowery*

### Senior Center Breakfast

Recently some of our board members helped out at the Senior Center Community Breakfast, which is held the first Saturday of the month from 8 to 11 am at the Senior Center. The event is free, but donations are welcome and is presented compliments of United Health Care & Profitable Planning with proceeds to benefit the Silverton Senior Center. Besides a delicious meal being served, a business and a non-profit are invited to make a presentation. Thanks to Fred, Tracy, Judy, Chris, Carrie and Ruth.



## Homer Davenport Community Festival!! August 5,6,7, 2022 Coolidge-McClaine Park

Once again the Historical Society will be hosting the very popular Coin Toss booth. And once again we are actively seeking volunteers to help us share the fun. If you would like to be a part of this event (our most important fund raiser), please leave a message at the museum at 503-873-7070 or email us at [silverton.museum@live.com](mailto:silverton.museum@live.com). I guarantee you will be entertained!

Two hour shifts will run from noon to 8 pm Friday and Saturday and noon to 6 pm on Sunday. Everyone is welcome to be a Carnival barker for a day!!



*Fun!*



*Fun!*



*Fun!*

*Fun!*



*Fun!*





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*Celebrating Over 45 Years in the Community*

**WWW.SILVERTONMUSEUM.ORG**

**Thank you to our new and renewing members,  
our generous donors and to anyone who has  
given anonymously to the Museum or any of its projects.**

***You're the best!!***

**Judy Lowery   John Burke   Diane Roubal   Larsen & Flynn Insurance**



1954 Days of Homer Parade

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