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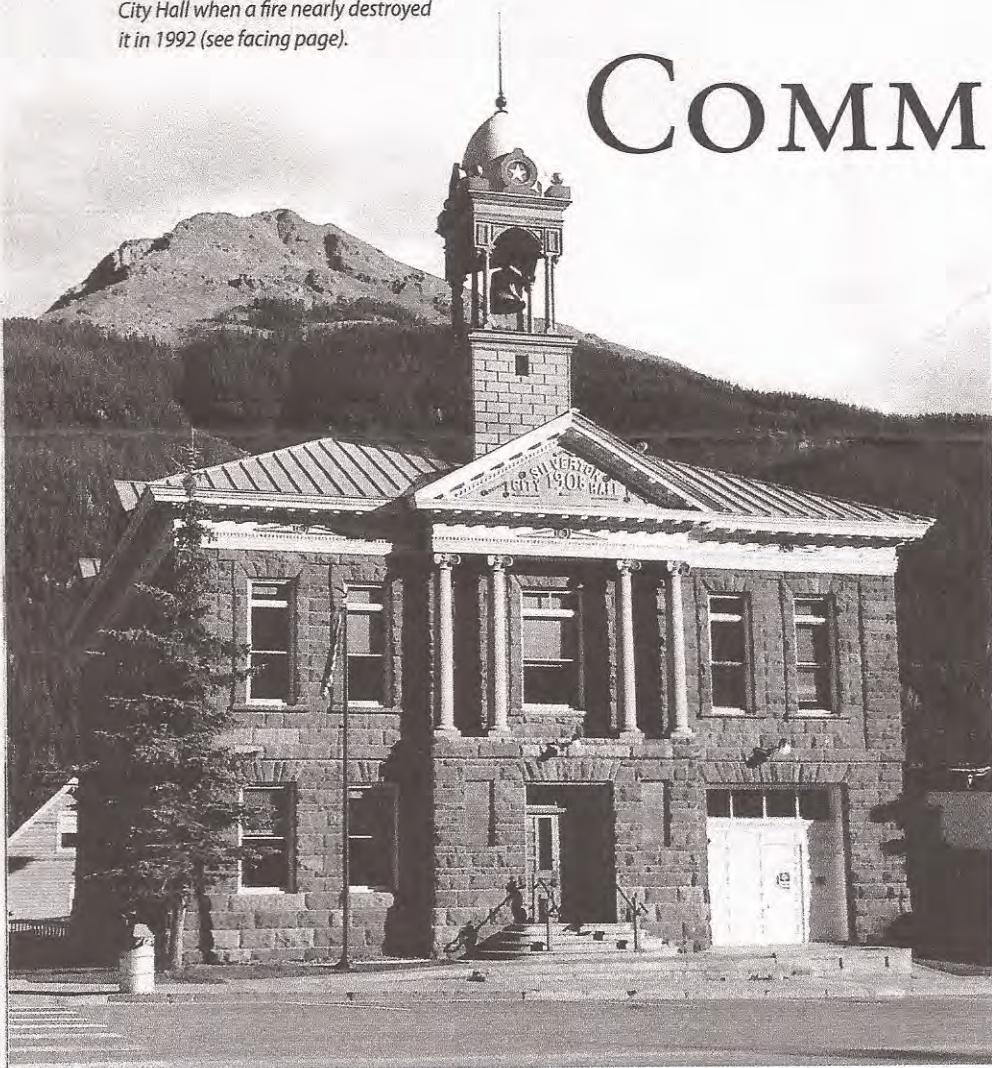
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BUILDING COMMUNITIES

Celebrating 20 Years of the State Historical Fund

Silverton's citizens rallied to save their City Hall when a fire nearly destroyed it in 1992 (see facing page).



# BUILDING COMMUNITIES

*Celebrating  
Twenty Years  
of the State  
Historical Fund*

*Preserving a building that's dying from old age can be emotional enough, so imagine the stress on a community when a disaster nearly destroys its very center. Such was the case in Silverton in 1992, when a fire almost fatally swallowed the City Hall.*

*Bev Rich, Silverton's "Godmother of Preservation," recalls it all too well: "We were all gathered in the county courthouse to decide what to do—people were in their PJs, half dressed, hair uncombed, all in shock, people crying—I knew I needed to get on the phone. I called the State Historical Fund and within two days, we had a \$3,000 emergency grant and a structural engineer on site evaluating the building." Even with SHF—a program of History Colorado—and other organizations trying to mitigate the damage, the City Hall, donning an eerie shroud of ice and ash, burned for six days straight in 30-below-zero weather. "It was like something out of a horror story," Rich remembers.*

BY STEVE TURNER  
Vice President for Preservation Programs



*When the smoke finally cleared, Silverton was left with a shell of a building and a project of overwhelming magnitude. But in a stroke of serendipity, the town found itself with a horde of unemployed skilled workers ready to pitch in, laid off the year before when the local mine closed. Bids to restore the building came in from as far as San Francisco, but instead the town opted to use its own. "It's not the*

*easiest place to live, so people who live here want to live here," Rich says with pride. "Everyone has a stake in the town." And so Silverton's citizens worked to restore the City Hall, and in 1996, the town received the National Honor Award from the National Trust for Historic Preservation.*

*Though devastating, the experience put Silverton on the national map for preservation, as it acquired National Historic Landmark status—becoming one of only twenty such designees in Colorado. While Silverton would ultimately receive more than \$500,000 in SHF grant awards toward its City Hall restoration, the real wealth of the project came from its own people, eager to mend its charred nucleus back to life.*

While many states struggle to access financial resources to preserve their historic treasures, our state has the unique ability to harness the creativity of its people by financing their visions for historic places. Twenty-three years ago, Colorado implemented legislation to transform preservation into an accessible, viable tool for growth without sprawl. The value of historic preservation lies in its capacity to honor our shared heritage while simultaneously creating a new future for our communities.

In 1990 Colorado passed a constitutional amendment allowing limited-stakes gambling in the towns of Black Hawk, Central City, and Cripple Creek. Knowing that casino construction and gambling tourism could compromise the historic integrity of these quaint mountain towns, the legislature designated that a portion of gambling tax revenue be set aside for historic preservation. Since funding its first project in the State's 1993 fiscal year, the State Historical Fund has awarded more than \$250 million in grants to preserve Colorado's historic buildings, districts, and structures.

When we invest in preserving the built past, we create a

new future in its wake. We might create places for business, education, recreation, or civic engagement—but always, we create opportunity for communities to thrive. Whether it's a cemetery or a courthouse or an old rickety barn, the long-term value of any place is determined by the people who care so much that they take action to save that place. When I first became one of Colorado's Deputy State Historic Preservation Officers, I wanted to hear the real story of SHF from the people working to save these places, and to learn how it has strengthened Colorado's communities.

Recently I spoke to Rebecca Goodwin of La Junta, who recalled the project SHF afforded her community in 2008. A team of surveyors from Colorado Preservation, Inc. worked with more than fifty landowners to complete a Cultural Resources Survey of the Purgatoire River Region. From the start, the project brought to the surface a common gritty undercurrent between landowners and preservationists. Surveyors recognized that private landowners had a wealth of resources that only they could access; for example, one private owner had fought for decades to protect some

American Indian and homesteading artifacts. "There's always this concern among private owners that the only way to protect the cultural resources on their land is by essentially keeping them secret," says Goodwin. For owners of a ranch passed down for five generations, the hesitancy is understandable. But as the surveyors and historians built relationships with landowners and deferred to them to uncover resources on their land, the landowners saw any threat diminish.

As the two groups came to trust one another, they discovered they had the same goal—to protect Colorado's historic vestiges—but they couldn't fully accomplish it without collaboration. "It was a remarkable outreach and educational experience," Goodwin

says. By the end of the project, more than a million acres on 500-plus sites had been surveyed and documented. Revealing a deep new well of information, the project opened doors for the community, which in 2009 hosted "A Home on the Range," an educational podcast series of oral histories gathered from the survey. But perhaps most important, the project set precedence for future interactions between

preservationists and landowners, and the trust it bred for the region's community has proven invaluable.

While Otero County has built relationships on private land, in Delta County, Chris Miller of the Western Colorado Interpretive Association (WCIA) faces the opposite hurdle. For years, Colorado Parks & Wildlife and the Bureau of

Land Management have been trying to address how to preserve three historic resources on public lands in Escalante Canyon. When the discussion began, Parks & Wildlife held a policy of returning public lands "to the wild" by burning all structures on them—but preservationists knew these cabins needed a better fate. As the debate has continued for two decades, Parks &

Wildlife, though receptive to ideas and no longer interested in burning the properties, still has no mandate to preserve historic structures, and the cabins have fallen into disrepair. Luckily, preservationists such as Miller have worked to build community awareness for Delta County's long-term goals in the hope it will facilitate a productive conversation about Escalante Canyon.



"Captain Smith's Cabin" in Escalante Canyon

*Colorado Preservation, Inc. conducted a series of oral histories with landowners throughout the Purgatoire River region of southeastern Colorado.*



For the past few years, WCIA and Miller have been working to preserve the Hotchkiss Homestead, which features an unusual brick barn built even before the town of Hotchkiss, making it the oldest building of its kind in the North Fork Valley. “How can I verbalize [to the community] what this barn means?” she asks. “Sure, it may just be some barn that you drive by—but in reality, it represents the strong agricultural roots that helped build the area into one of the best award-winning fruit-growing regions in the state.” These efforts to build community support paid off when the Hotchkiss Homestead earned an SHF restoration grant, as well as National Register of Historic Places designation and status as an SHF Centennial Farm. “It takes a lot to make [historic preservation] happen. First you go to the state, then you go to the county, then you go to the community, and then you go to the citizens. It has to happen on all of those levels . . . but it helps to have a leg up from the state first,” says Miller, who insists progress thus far in Escalante Canyon would not have happened without SHF support to fund the many structural assessments needed to evaluate these valuable resources. Miller knows preservation is a collective effort, and if she can rally her community as she did with Hotchkiss, the cabins might yet survive.

Hotchkiss Homestead in the North Fork Valley



Salida, Colorado

Historic preservation has helped to “grow” communities on the Central Plains, too. The Kit Carson County Carousel is one of fewer than 150 remaining wooden carousels in the United States built between 1885 and 1930. Known nationally for its rarity and historic integrity, it’s another of Colorado’s twenty National Historic Landmarks. Kit Carson’s own Jo Downey, ever the enthusiast of this relic of bygone merriment, spearheaded much of this effort. However, she sees SHF’s effect in her community more broadly. “Preservation is perseverance and the fact that you can go back to the Fund over and over—it’s

not just a one-time thing of, ‘Here, we’ll do this for you.’ No. It’s ‘we’ll do this *with* you.’ And that’s what keeps you going,” Downey affirms.

This idea of ongoing collaboration got the region thinking. With an abundance of historical sites throughout the Central Plains, Cheyenne, Elbert, Lincoln, and Kit Carson counties created the *Our Journey* project, a website for regional heritage tourism. *Our Journey* features a calendar of events, links to tours and museums, maps, and a geocaching feature for the mobile scavenger hunter. The site simplifies planning for tourists and sprouts economic growth throughout the four counties. So where does SHF factor in? With a multitude of SHF-funded properties on *Our Journey*, SHF “has leveraged millions of dollars from local communities to get involved, and it has indirectly contributed to the growth of heritage tourism in the entire region,” says Downey. This collective spirit has allowed these localities to use their separate assets to fuel each other’s communities.

Heritage tourism efforts are growing rapidly statewide, including along the I-70 corridor in Georgetown. Here, preservation has comprehensively altered the economy. Full streets of restored buildings draw tourists interested in experiencing history in the context of a small mountain town. With the restoration of buildings such as the Alpine Museum—to name just one of the town’s more than seventy SHF projects—the youthful and energetic spirit that has come to attract tourists lives on.

“Preservation keeps the town vibrant,” says Cindy Neely of the Georgetown Trust for Conservation and Preservation, Inc. “It allows us not to stagnate, and for small towns like us, that’s how we survive—by staying fresh.” The revitalized commercial district and main thoroughfare has jumpstarted Georgetown’s local commerce by providing new rental spaces for local craftspeople, but it’s also created the town’s industry of heritage tourism, on which it now relies. As a tourist destination, Georgetown employs community members to operate art shops, restaurants, and the 1875 Hotel de Paris. For a small mountain town, Georgetown now thrives—and financially survives—on its heritage tourism market, creating new opportunities for its youth as the town both expands and ages.

Silverton—having rallied around its City Hall following the 1992 fire—can point to a major project that brought its community together. But in Greeley in Weld County, Linde Thompson sees SHF’s impact on a smaller scale. “Certainly there are the big projects, like the *Greeley Tribune* building or the county courthouse, but really it’s the buildings that are significant to a smaller group of people” that help maintain a community’s sense of pride and togetherness, says Thompson. “[SHF] has allowed people with not a lot of resources to enhance their buildings and, more importantly, maintain ownership of them.” Take, for example, the local Masonic Lodge, owned now by a small group of elderly citizens. At the lodge, they host pancake breakfasts and the Community Impact Awards; they get together socially and hold chapter meetings; and they maintain their small guild of friends, family, and neighbors

*Greeley’s Masonic Lodge*



*Georgetown’s Alpine Hose No. 2 and preservationist Cindy Neely (facing page)*



that gives all lodge-goers a sense of belonging. But the lodge was falling apart. If not for the support and assistance of Historic Greeley, Inc. in applying for SHF grants, the Masonic Lodge might have fallen into ruin. Numerous other small properties, including the First Baptist Church of Greeley, which first congregated in 1870, have found solace in the stability that preservation provides their longstanding network.

Likewise, Routt County views its multitude of smaller preservation projects as the region’s common thread. “You can see the State Historical Fund legacy at grants on every gateway into Routt County. From the east, you’ll pass the charming little red Mesa School. From the west, a few miles into the county, you’ll see the Carpenter Dawson Ranch . . .”



and on goes the vibrant Arianthé Stettner of Steamboat Springs. Stettner paints a picture so sweeping of the area's "magical, unique treasures," it seems no building in the county has gone untouched by preservation, which makes it impossible for her to narrow her enthusiasm to one project.

SHF projects have allowed her community to stay true to its myriad traditions, such as Steamboat Springs' annual winter carnival—complete with fireworks and the famous

Lighted Man—which has taken place for the past century at the Howelsen Hill facilities. With such active citizens, as well as an ongoing influx of tourists, Steamboat Springs doesn't take for granted the opportunities afforded by SHF, or any type of economic support: "When it happens for us, it's a really big deal," Stettner notes pointedly, emphasizing the difficulty rural areas can face in finding support. But with the community invested, Steamboat Springs continues to preserve its traditions and strongholds, including the Perry-Mansfield Performing Arts School & Camp, to sustain its rural and eclectic roots.

And isn't that what we create when we value our own history together—our collective sense of uniqueness and worth? We can discover what made us into a community in the past and what can hold us together as a community in the future. It's this shared priority that makes Colorado so colorful.

When my sister came to visit recently, I took her on a whirlwind tour of the state. As we came across this school and that church preserved through SHF projects, she finally remarked that it seems Colorado has a stronger preservation ethic than what she sees in her home state of Georgia. While I can't say with any authority that the ethic here is stronger, I can say that Colorado puts its money where its mouth is, and this communal value is what makes the State Historical Fund such an effective resource.

It reminds me of something Jo Downey said to me: "People always think of the Rockies out here. But Colorado really is one-third mountains, one-third plains, and one-third plateau. The Fund, then, really acts as an equalizer in the state—it helps put all of our history on the same map, on the same level." That's one big community I'm proud to say we're all working together to create.

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*Ribbon-cutting at the Rock Creek Stage Stop in rural Routt County*