



CUSTER COUNTY PAST & PRESENT

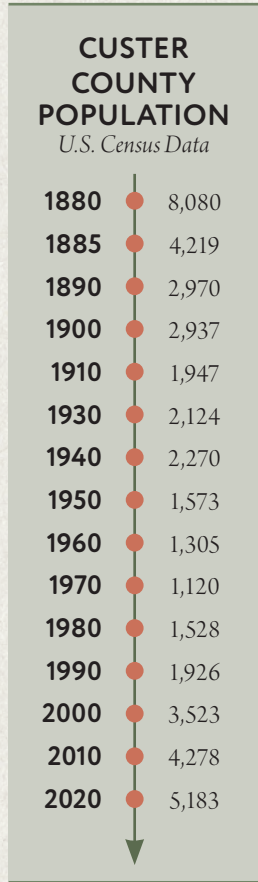


A HISTORICAL DIGEST FOR EXPLORING THE WET MOUNTAIN VALLEY



TIMELINE

of the Early Years



1800 and before The first Native American people to inhabit Custer County were the Ute Tribe. They used the area as a summer hunting ground. They left when the white man moved in about 1865.

1806 The first Americans, Pike and his starving followers, ascend Grape Creek seeking an open mountain pass in January.

1845 Mexico loses the war and thus Colorado becomes property of the United States.

1848 Fremont leads his ill-fated expedition through the county on his way south and west to disaster.

1861 Colorado becomes a U.S. Territory.

1869 Homesteaders and ranchers begin to fill the Valley.

1870 Wulsten's German Colonization Society arrives. Gold is discovered at Brown's Spring (which became Rosita). The first "towns" – Dora, Ula, Colfax – appear.

1870-1879 Colfax was settled by 250 German colonists in 1870.

1871-1891 Ula, the English community center, was the first town in the valley and served as the first county seat from 1877-1878. Named for Ute Chief Ouray. (Ura, Ure), but misspelled by the post office.

1872 Rosita was the first mining town in the county. It had a brewery, newspaper, four churches, the state's largest cheese factory and was served by three stage lines. Peak population was over 1,200. The town burned in 1881. County seat from 1878-1886.

1876 Colorado becomes a state. Custer County is part of Fremont County.

1877 Custer County was established and named after the recently killed General, though many favored the name "Humboldt."

1877 Edmund C. Bassick discovered the Bassick Mine. This mine yielded both silver and gold.

1879 The town of Silver Cliff was incorporated. US Census of 1880 recorded it as the third largest city in CO with a population of 5,040. County seat from 1886-1928.

1879 The Wet Mountain Valley's largest herds began to arrive with Edwin Beckwith. Other cattlemen and their herds settled in the parts of the valley where runoff-irrigated land was prime for growing hay and raising livestock.

1880 The county booms with miners and settlers, population over 8,000. Wealthy English tourists discover the delights of the Valley.

1881 Westcliffe had its start when the Denver and Rio Grande Western Railroad was extended. On May 11th at 7:20 pm, the first train (an excursion special) rolled into Westcliffe via Grape Creek carrying 200 passengers.

1881-1889 Narrow gauge line up Grape Creek.

1881 Wetmore was established as a trading center on the old Hardscrabble Trail.

1882 End of mining boom. Many towns disappear.

1883 *Wet Mountain Tribune* began publication.

1886 Custer County formed its first school district on February 13.

1887 The Town of Westcliffe was incorporated on November 21.

1890 Narrow gauge line was flooded out beyond repair and removed.

1895 *Custer County Cattle Growers' Association* was organized on July 22.

1901-1938 Standard gauge line via Texas Creek.

1902-03 Lake DeWeese reservoir was built to provide water for Cañon City's Lincoln Park.

1902-1905 Custer City opened with much hoopla in 1902, complete with electricity, water system, hotel, bank newspaper, and baseball diamond. By 1905 it was dead.

1912 The earliest accounts have the Rainbow Trail construction beginning in 1912 and completed by 1930.

1928 Westcliffe becomes the county seat. Courthouse is built in 1929.

1936-1939 San Isabel, San Isabel City, started in early 1930s as Pueblo Reservoir and Resort.

1954 All schoolhouses in Custer County were consolidated in the new District C-1. The new school was opened January 1.

1970 US Census Bureau population 1,120.

2015 Westcliffe and Silver Cliff become the first International Dark Sky Community in Colorado.

2020 US Census Bureau population 5,183.

The historic top photo on the cover is attributed to Mimmie Lowe, possibly from when she photographed the Wet Mountain Valley for the November 1901 issue of "Ranch and Range" magazine. The current bottom photo was taken by Scott Dankof Photography to get a close match.



WELCOME

to Custer County, Colorado

Everyone who enters the Wet Mountain Valley, is almost certainly awe-struck by a remarkable rugged, towering wall of beauty that extends for the length of the Valley and beyond... the Sangre de Cristo Range. The mountains present an inspiring paradise and an aura of "welcoming."

People of diverse persuasions might view this area in accordance with their particular frame of reference. To the rancher it appears pastoral, a place where animals belong; to the hiker/adventurer, a place to explore with high peaks to climb; to the artist, an unsurpassed subject with colors and shapes to capture on canvas; the hunter and fisherman look forward to success in their adventures; the developer sees opportunities to build new communities; to the entrepreneur, a place to start a business; a retiree, seeing it as a sanctuary, a place to simply enjoy, and the tourist/visitor might see combinations of several of these possibilities, though some are obviously in conflict. The Sangre de Cristos seem to extend a welcome to all.

The culture the earliest settlers (miners and ranchers) created in what is now Custer County, is still somewhat maintained – a great part of the county's charm. A rapidly growing population with a technological, urban flavor is changing that. Yet, most residents want

HERITAGE

Undisturbed ranch land, still reminiscent of Colorado's earliest days, stretches across the Valley where horses and cattle roam. Foxes and pronghorn antelope make their homes in fields and pastures irrigated by spring runoff. As spring turns to summer, the lower Valley turns a rich green, dotted with blue flag irises, Indian paintbrush and other alpine wildflowers. Afternoon storms roll over the peaks like waves. If clouds linger, sunsets turn them pink and orange. By fall, patterns cross mown hayfields, and huge bales stand ready to feed livestock through the winter. Wetlands to the north reflect the changing leaves, awaiting winter's freeze.



to preserve the area's early ambiance and integrity. To this end, the history and the heritage continue to be honored.

"Heritage" is the key word in expressions of pride. Old time residents expanded on the term. One individual claimed, "It is the independent, self-reliant spirit that exists, inherited from strong, hard-working people who settled here." Another said, "Our Valley heritage equates with our proud history."

One need not be descended from a pioneer family to celebrate the Valley's history and heritage. New traditions, new ideas blend with old in a shared culture. The past has shaped the present, the present will shape the future in a continuous, evolving heritage. An inheritance all Custer County residents receive is one gifted from Nature – towering mountains, spacious meadows and prairies, sparkling streams, clear lakes, dark skies, a beautiful environment. The challenge is to keep this treasure untarnished, unspoiled. Tourists, visitors and new residents are welcomed in Custer County with the expectation to help preserve and protect this special corner of the world.

— Willdra Walker Ruzanski

◀ **PRESENT** Willdra Walker Ruzanski is a descendant of settlers who arrived in the Wet Mountain Valley in the 1880s. She grew up in the shadow of the Sangre de Cristo mountains and spent most of her time on the family ranch, W.A.W. Cattle Ranch (Walker Family Ranch). For nine years she wrote a column for the *Wet Mountain Tribune* called "Tales & Tidbits" which garnered her three Colorado Press Association Awards.

▼ **PAST** A young Willdra Walker competing at an all-girl rodeo, 1963



RANCHING

in the Wet Mountain Valley



▼ PRESENT
Roundup in the
Wet Mountain Valley

Ranching Heritage

Throughout the history of the Valley the ranchers were the stable economic force that paid the county's bills and supported the local towns. Ranchers, by necessity, have learned the unique seasons and natural phenomena of the Valley. Still, generation after generation stay because there is a quality of life in the Valley that makes its less traveled roads very precious.

Along with the mining boom, many people moved to the Valley and cleared the land for housing and crops. Cattlemen then brought several large herds into the newly opened land, igniting the Valley's chief industry and further changing the landscape from a high prairie to hay meadows.

The Wet Mountain Valley's largest herds began to arrive in 1879 with Edwin Beckwith, who settled a half-dozen miles north of Silver Cliff. Other cattlemen and their herds settled in parts of the Valley where runoff-irrigated land was prime for growing hay and raising livestock. An estimated 13,000 head of cattle roamed Custer County by 1880.

Custer County ranching continues with active grazing, hay and calving operations. Conservation easements help maintain the county's open space and beauty.



First, "guttural growls," then low-pitched roars and finally ear-splitting bellows – a fierce bull fight begins. It happens in cattle country; some epic battles are permanently preserved in local history. Once, a rancher observed two Hereford bulls engaged in lethal combat. Suddenly, one bull simply disappeared. It had fallen into an abandoned, open mine shaft. Luckily, it became wedged (within reach) in the narrowing shaft, instead of falling to the depths. A wench truck was called. Tying ropes to the bull's horns and legs took hours of maneuvering but finally the animal was safely hoisted out. The noisy challenges of battling bulls are still heard from time to time – a sign that the time-honored business, cattle ranching, still exists in Custer County. That's a good thing.

— Willdra Walker Ruzanski

Centennial Ranches

Ranching has been the bedrock of the economy in the Wet Mountain Valley since the 1800s and unsurprisingly Custer County is home to 11 Centennial Ranches. To be considered for honorable recognition, farming or ranching properties must have remained in the same family continuously for at least 100 years, each property must still operate as a working farm or ranch and farms or ranches must have a minimum of 160 acres.

Each generation has been dedicated to the careful stewardship of land and livestock. The continued commitment to ranching ensures beautiful landscapes, lush hay ground, open space and conserved land and water resources. This way of life represents a culture and traditions that are unique and rare – ones that bring character and identity to our community.

"We are proud of the Russell Berry Ranch and the family legacy of being good caretakers of our land and animals since 1901."

— Rita Berry Wilson



◀ PAST
Old Home on the
Walker Family Ranch



- 1870 ● Frank Kennicott Ranch
- 1871 ● Koch Ranch
- 1872 ● San Isabel Ranch
- 1874 ● Elton Camper Ranch
- 1879 ● Brandenburg Ranch
- 1888 ● DeGree Ranch
- 1901 ● Russell Berry Ranch
- 1901 ● Dieckman Ranch
- 1911 ● Walker Family Ranch
- 1917 ● Harold G. Vickerman Ranch
- 1919 ● Miller Ranch

▼ PAST Kennicott girls sitting on a fence, 1899-1903



▼ PAST Berry Family Ranch



Ranchers take pride in their brands. Up to 3,400 brands are registered in Colorado; they don't all belong to ranchers. A certified stock brand certificate, and a \$3.00 application fee receipt, dated April 18, 1952, were found in an old record book at St. Luke's Episcopal Church. In an after-service fellowship gathering, the conversation centered around the new discovery. A communicant, new to the Valley, added humor with a sudden "fear induced" expression and a tongue-in-cheek inquiry. "Do you brand new Church members?" he asked with mock apprehension as he edged toward the door. "No!" he was assured. "We don't. The assessment hasn't been paid since 1957, so we no longer even own the brand." Someone quietly added, "Fortunately for you."

— Willdra Walker Ruzanski



HISTORIC CHURCHES

in the Wet Mountain Valley



Hope Lutheran Church 310 S 3rd St

1978 National Register of Historic Places

The original church, and a later version, were built in 1917 by members of the German Colony which came here from Chicago in 1870. Designed by its pastor John Reininga, the church houses one of the oldest Lutheran congregations in Colorado.

St. Luke's Episcopal Church 201 S 3rd St

The church was consecrated in Rosita in 1877 and rebuilt in Silver Cliff in 1879. In 1914 it was moved to its present location. Silver from the Racine Boy mine was used for the beautiful inlaid cross behind the altar.

Our Lady of Assumption Catholic Church

109 S 5th St

The first church was constructed in Rosita in 1877. A new church was built in Silver Cliff in 1880 and moved to the southern edge of Westcliffe in 1890. In 1931, the building was moved to the corner of 5th and Rosita. The historic church was demolished in early 2007, making way for a new facility completed later that year.

Community United Methodist Church

206 S 6th St

The Community United Methodist Church has been participating in the life of Custer County citizens since 1923.



▲ PRESENT Hope Lutheran Church



▲ PRESENT St. Luke's Episcopal Church

SCHOOLHOUSES

of the Past

When the populations of Silver Cliff and Westcliffe grew in 1879, Custer County formed its first school district on February 13, 1886. Rather than establishing one or two larger schools, the school district created 24 one-room schools and two classrooms in private homes. No school was more than five miles from another, guaranteeing a manageable walk for all students.

In these one-room schoolhouses, all ages learned together in rooms heated by wood-burning stoves. School years were limited to six months as winter conditions were too harsh for children walking to and from school. These rural schools also served as community buildings, election halls and churches. With the closing of the mines, followed by the Great Depression and WWII, the era of the one-room schoolhouse ended. In 1954, all schoolhouses in Custer County were consolidated in the new District C-1.

Today, six of the schoolhouses are still standing.

Silver Cliff School 501 First St

Built in 1878, this two room school was utilized until the 1950s when the building became the Silver Cliff Community Club. The bellcoat on the roof remains, and the bell may be viewed at the Silver Cliff Museum. The building is now an apartment complex.

Westcliff School 304 S 4th St

1989 National Register of Historic Places

Built by Archie Scherer in 1891, this two-room schoolhouse functioned as a school until 1953. It is characterized by its unusual, flat-topped gable roof and fieldstone façade. It is now home to the Museum of Westcliffe History and the Valley Parks and Recreation and Youth Center.

Willows School 495 Willows Ln (CR 141)

1992 State Register of Historic Places

1993 National Register of Historic Places

The simple, 1889 wood-framed rural schoolhouse, built by E.F. Kokowsky, operated until 1948 due to a school consolidation, but it continues to function as a community center.



▲ PRESENT Westcliff School



◀ PRESENT Silver Cliff School

▼ PRESENT Willows School



▼ PRESENT Canda-Pine Grove School (on private land)



Education was important to Valley pioneers. Little one-room school houses were scattered throughout the Valley, and remarkable efforts were exerted to insure their success. The tiny Adobe school had an excellent and tenacious teacher. Wife of a rancher, mother to three boys, she was confronted with a problem. Her two older boys, of school age, could attend the school; but, what to do with her infant, too young to go with his father in his ranching chores, and no one to care for him. So, each school day, she bundled him up, and with blankets, food and, diapers, took him with her. Her students took turns walking, feeding and diapering the small child, as she dispensed Readin', Ritin' and 'Rithmatic lessons, while unofficially adding a fourth subject, "Early Child Care," not usually found in rural school curriculum.

— Willdra Walker Ruzanski

HISTORIC RANCHES

Preserving our Heritage



Beckwith Ranch 64159 CO-69
1998 National Register of Historic Places

Set against the dramatic Sangre de Cristo mountain range, Beckwith Ranch stands as a picturesque reminder of the Valley's ranching history. With its signature red roofs and white clapboard siding, the ranch has inspired artists, tourists and history buffs alike.

Looking at it now, restored to its heyday in the 1900s, it may be hard to believe that centered in the mansion is the original log cabin built by the Beckwith brothers in 1871. Room by room, Elton and Edwin added on to the log cabin to make it into the beautiful mansion you see today.

The Beckwith brothers received land grants in the Wet Mountain Valley. Edwin, who arrived first, recognized the business opportunity to sell beef to miners. He purchased his first cattle herd from the famous Charles Goodnight who owned the Rock Creek Ranch in Pueblo.

Elton joined his brother in 1870 and over the next 30 years, the Beckwith Ranch would grow to be one of the largest ranches in Colorado. Elton served as a Colorado Senator for one term in 1886-1888.

He was also the first president of the Wet Mountain Valley Cattleman's Association.

▼ **PRESENT** Beckwith Ranch

▼ **PAST** Beckwith Mansion in various states of construction



In today's dollars, the brothers were valued at 50 million dollars by 1898. Edwin Beckwith died in 1898 and after Elton died in 1907, his wife Elsie sold the ranch and moved to Denver.

After the Beckwiths, the ranch changed hands many times. The ranch complex, consisting of the Beckwith mansion, a bunkhouse, horse barn, dairy barn, two guest-houses, a tack house, a small shop building and a two-hole outhouse, was donated to the Friends of Beckwith Ranch, Inc., a non-profit organization, by Paul and Phyllis Seegers in 1996. Ten of the eleven buildings were registered on the National Register of Historic Places in 1998. From 1999 through 2007, the complex was completely restored inside and out and stands today as it once did in 1907.

The Friends of Beckwith Ranch, an all-volunteer organization, is dedicated to preserving the mansion and the buildings as a Ranching Heritage Center where visitors can learn about Colorado's rich heritage.



PAST ►
Beckwith Stables

Kennicott Cabin 63161 CO-69
1997 National Register of Historic Places

The Kennicott Cabin is a rare example of a two-story log cabin and is significant for its association with the early settlement of the area. Frank Langdon Kennicott built the cabin on his original homestead in 1869-70, and his family lived there until the early 1890s. Originally from Illinois, the Kennicotts came to Colorado because they were suffering from tuberculosis. They recovered quickly, took 160-acre homesteads in the Valley, and soon went into the cattle and freight businesses.

Today a small sign on the west side of Highway 69 three miles north of Westcliffe identifies the log cabin, and the surrounding land has been placed in a conservation easement.

Pines Ranch 379 Chalice Rd

At the base of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, sits the Pines Ranch, a staple of the Wet Mountain Valley for over 130 years. Originally known as "The Pines," the area was settled by European immigrants seeking a healthy environment for respiratory ailments. They utilized a Dutch Colonial home as a hotel for a summer resort where guests could restore their bodies, minds and spirits and enjoy the Colorado mountains. Currently a non-profit, the Pines Ranch preserves the unique property and shares the gift of rest through retreats, cabin rentals and special events.

PAST ►
Kennicott Cabin/Porch



◀ **PRESENT**
Kennicott Cabin and wrought iron marker on CO-69

"We are very thankful for the generations of families whose hard work and stewardship of the land have kept Custer County the special place that it remains today."

— Frank Kennicott's descendants

Aspenholme, Pines Ranch 379 Chalice Rd
2021 National Register of Historic Places

Constructed in 1898 as an elegant mountain residence for Englishwoman Sara Isabelle Holdsworth, the house she christened "Aspenholme" served as the lodge for guests at the Pines Summer Resort by 1911. The two-story frame house is a good example of a shingle-style residence built in rural Custer County during the late nineteenth century. The building is further significant for its association with British members of the "English Colony," who brought British cultural traditions to the area beginning in the 1870s and extending into the first decades of the twentieth century.



◀ **PRESENT** Pines Ranch Aspenholme



ROSITA

Elevation 8,809'



PAST ►
Rosita School, 1880s



Town of Rosita

Today a ghost town, Rosita was a vibrant mining town in the early 1870s. At the same time the Germans and other ranchers were settling in the Valley, miners were searching the hills for gold and silver. Richard Irwin led a group of prospectors who found gold in the Rosita hills. Local rancher, Daniel Baker and several visiting friends located a rich outcrop which was soon to become the Senator Mine. Other properties followed, establishing the boom town of Rosita, named for the little roses that grew along the hillsides.

The town expanded to cover a square mile and inhabit more than 1,500 people, three churches, a bank, a couple of hotels and a dozen businesses



PAST ►
The Rosita Post Office was active from 1875-1966

PAST ►
A vibrant community once dotted the hills of Rosita



PRESENT ► Bassick Mine tailings and decaying remnants of this incredibly productive (over 2.5 million dollars during its lifespan) still remain. *Privately owned.*

by 1874, then slowly died following the later discoveries at Silver Cliff. The town was used in the filming of the 1958 western movie *Saddle the Wind*. Today it is a quiet residential neighborhood and the cemetery marks the graves of early settlers through the 1900s.

In 1877 the ex-sailor-turned-pro prospector Edmund C. Bassick discovered gold and silver two miles north of Rosita and founded the Bassick Mine. It was one of Colorado's deepest, richest and most advanced gold mines for its time 1877-1885 and directly supported the adjacent town of Querida. The Bassick Mine eventually closed due to rising labor tensions and falling ore production. The town of Querida later became a ghost town.



WETMORE

Elevation 6,806'

Town of Wetmore

For centuries, Wetmore was an important junction for native tribes, Spanish conquistadors and early explorers. Waterways served as natural highways, and Wetmore was a perfect junction for many groups. Here in southern Colorado, the Arkansas River was the early equivalent of a busy freeway. And for travelers from the east, Hardscrabble Creek and its tributaries were among the first waterways leading directly into the rugged mountains.

Wetmore Post Office 682 CR 395

2008 *State Register of Historic Places*
2008 *National Register of Historic Places*

Built as a residence, store and office for Dr. J.W. Walters, the retail operation included the sale of drugs, sundries and limited grocery items. The Wetmore Post Office served as the hub of local community activity and communication since beginning operation in 1881. The addition of the switchboard for the local Siloam Telephone Company in 1910 added to the communications function of the building. The telephone switchboard operated until 1961 and the post office continues to serve the region.

▼ PAST Wetmore Post Office late 1800s. You can faintly see where the previous storefront advertised "DRUGS AND NOTIONS" in the painted storefront.



▼ PRESENT Wetmore Post Office



Custer County's Sangre de Cristos boast legends of lost gold mines. Geo. Skinner discovered a mine (circa 1870s), then disappeared. Later his abandoned cabin, his and his mule's body were found. His diary told of a rich, gold vein, but he'd left no map or directions. In an 1880 blizzard, two prospectors sought shelter in a high-mountain cave. They unearthed several crudely smelted gold bars, which they later sold in Silver Cliff. Their attempt to return to the cave was unsuccessful. During the 1870s, rumors surfaced of a golden ledge running the length of the Sangres. Stories of the Lost Tenderfoot, La Cavern del Oro and others exist in writings. Their actual existence is questionable, but all of these lost riches are a source of wealth – in stories and myths – a part of Custer County's colorful history.

—Willdra Walker Ruzanski



SILVER CLIFF

Elevation 7,896'



Silver Cliff Town Hall and Engine House

610 E Main St
1997 State Register of Historic Places

Silver Cliff's hectic mining days are over, but many relics remain at the Silver Cliff Museum. The museum's 1879 building once served as Silver Cliff's original

town hall and engine house and still stands on its original site. The museum houses artifacts depicting a history and a way of life revolving around mining, ranching and homesteading.

The building reflects a conscious effort by the community to create an infrastructure for the booming town of Silver Cliff, and it served for many years as a meeting place. It is also important as a surviving example of the typical wood frame, false front commercial buildings constructed during early periods of rapid population growth.



PRESENT ▲
The Silver Cliff Museum



▲ PAST ▶
The town of Silver Cliff at the height of the mining boom, circa 1880



▼ PAST Lew Kee House / Sing Kee Laundry



Lew Kee House / Sing Kee Laundry

507 E Main St

The building (built in 1888) is less significant than the man who owned and ran the laundry business from this site until his death in 1927. During his 42 years in Silver Cliff, Lew Sing Kee counseled troubled citizens, taught Sunday School and maintained great relationships with many of the town's children and teens. He was a successful and astute businessman, and is buried in the Silver Cliff cemetery. Artifacts from Sing Kee Laundry are on display in the Silver Cliff Museum. *Privately owned.*

▼ PRESENT Presbyterian Parsonage



Presbyterian Parsonage

414 First St

This unique residence was built in 1887 as the parsonage for the Presbyterian Church. Originally located near the corner of Mill and Broadway, the building was moved in the 1990s to its present location. *Privately owned.*



Schaffer Building

630 E Main St

The last brick commercial building remaining from Silver Cliff's colorful past (1888) was originally a drug store. Later, Mrs. Inez Sumner had a thriving beekeeping and honey business in the building for many years. It is now a popular restaurant.



▲ PRESENT Casebeer House

Casebeer circa 1895. This house is the last masonry brick residence remaining in the once prosperous mining community and is unique in that it was built using bricks manufactured at a local brick yard. *Privately owned.*

Casebeer House

415 Fleetwood St

This brick building of Victorian design was built by Perry E.



◀ PAST
Schaffer Bros Building, 1900

◀ PRESENT
A restaurant occupies the Schaffer Building

Entz Grocery

531 E Main St

The distinctive half-round, stained glass window is the last of any decorative arts from this period of Silver Cliff's history. The building was built in 1881 and was a blacksmith shop and hardware store. From 1909 to 1967 the building was a grocery and general merchandise store owned by several families, including the late Lawrence and Wilda Entz. *Privately owned.*

▼ PRESENT Entz Grocery



▼ PAST
Entz Enterprises, circa 1881



◀ PAST
Downtown Silver Cliff during a 4th of July parade, late 1880s

SILVER FACTS

Silver is more malleable than any other element, except for gold. In ancient Egypt, silver was valued much more highly than gold. Many times silver was mined as a by-product in the search for gold. While Colorado was a leader in silver production during the late 1800s, Alaska is now the main producer of silver in the U.S.

PHOTO ALBUM

A Peek into the Past...



Mrs. Sherman Bell, 1888



John Brandenburg



Sa el and Anna Vickerman, with daughter Ruby



Anna Kennicott, age 11, mopping up spilled milk - photo 1899 by Eugenia Kennicott, age 16 -



Ed Foss Coal & Transfer Wagon



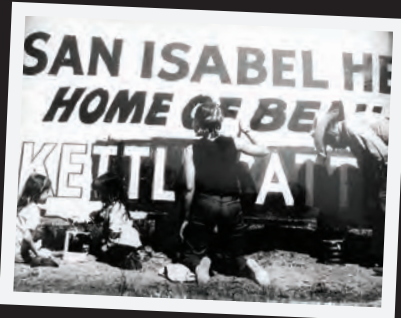
Main Street Silver Cliff, 1894



Interior view of Louie Wolfe's Saloon with bartender Gus Kitzman, Silver Cliff 1885 - 1905



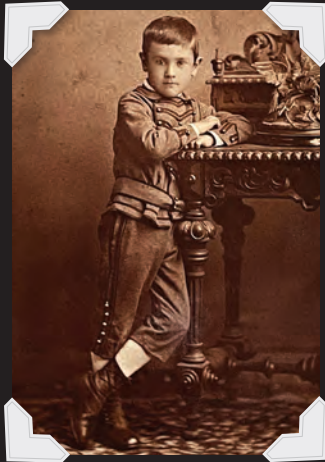
Olive MacKenzie Canda, 1919



Kettle Cattle Sign Painting



Elkhorn Palace near Rosita, 1870s



Rockwell B. Canda, 1897



We ore Views Portraits and Tin Types, 1885 - 1890



Russell and Velma Vickerman, sons Wilbur and baby Harold, on their front porch, 1926



Hanssen Garage and Filling Station



K th Sisters Amanda, Hulda, Lena and Amalia wait for the train at the Westcliff Depot



Susie Loaman and actress Jane Fonda on the 1978 set of "Comes A Horseman" - one of the movies she starred in that were filmed in Custer County



Independence Day Foot Race, Silver Cliff, 1904



W.H. We ore's Children, 1880



Westcliff Depot, 1920s



Lew Sing Kee in Native Dress



Texas Creek Ranch, Denver & Rio Grande Railroad, early 1900s



Main Street Silver Cliff, late 1880s



Annie Erps, 1911



Willdra and George Ruzanski on their ranch with horses, Tando and Rex, 1962



Bessie Coleman and baby Stanley



William B. Wadsworth, 1918
Founder of Silver City



The Beardsley Family enjoying
Custer County Independence Day Celebration, 1903



Ball Graves & West Freighting Company, Westcliffe



First day of School, 1903



World War I Send-Off at the Westcliffe Depot



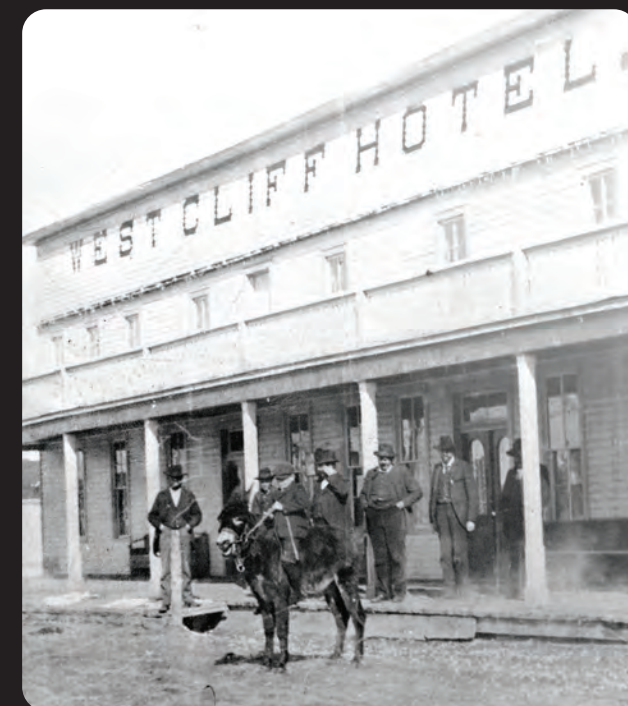
George and Buddy Draper
Team Roping, 1967



Henry and Ethel Kastendieck,
Wedding Portrait, 1918



Gary Ziegler,
Acting Sheriff, 1976



Gentlemen outside the Westcliffe Hotel, 1890



Art Hebbes with his Piper Cub and dog Blondie, 1948



San Isabel Post
Office, 1930s



Main Street Westcliffe, 1892



Alfred Jeske outside the Toad Motel



Roy Lapsley & Will Falkenberg,
builders of the Rainbow Trail



J.I. Case Threshing Machine Co.



The Hartbauer Siblings, 1946



Otto and Bertha Voss stacking hay



Offices of Doctors Sperry and Collins, 1890 - 1910

GUEST RANCHES

Authentic Western Experiences

Bear Basin Ranch
473 CR 271



Bear Basin Ranch is a 4000-acre working ranch protected by a Conservation Easement nestled in the heart of the Wet Mountains at 9000 feet in Southern Colorado's Custer Country. The ranch land was utilized as a hunting ground for roaming bands of buffalo hunters, then as a summer home to the Mountain Ute. The ranch was later settled

as a mining camp, part of the Silver Park Prospect, in the 1860's. The camp became a stage station when the Oak Creek wagon road from Florence was completed to Rosita in the early 1870s joining an earlier road up Hardscrabble Pass meeting at the ranch.

In 1970, Gary Ziegler, trained in archeology, freshly discharged from the Army and working in Colorado Springs, sought a quieter life in the

Wet Mountains and nearby valley. Eleven miles east of Silver Cliff, he found an abandoned 350-acre ranch no one seemed to want. Ziegler swooped it up for \$80 an acre naming it Bear Basin Ranch after nearby Bear Peak.

Eventually, Bear Basin Ranch grew from 350 acres to its present 4,000 acres as Ziegler convinced friends to buy in on adjacent parcels as they became available. His wife, Amy Finger Ziegler, took things a step further in 2000 by encouraging other owners of the collected land to join them in establishing a conservation easement with the Palmer Land Conservancy, ensuring the ranch remains undeveloped indefinitely.

PRESENT ►

Elin Parker working the land at Music Meadows Guest Ranch



▲ PAST Filming of the movie *Vengeance Valley* at Mountain Meadows, 1950-1951



Music Meadows Guest Ranch
6076 CR 119

The Parker Family purchased the Beck Ranch in 1968, a stunning 3,800 acre true working cattle ranch. Music Meadows Guest Ranch was born of Elin Parker Ganshow's passion for ranching and for people coming together through her entrepreneurial spirit. Elin grew up learning ranching from her Dad and spending as much time on horseback as possible.

In 2008 the Parker Family conserved the ranch through San Isabel Land Protection Trust. This action ensured the ranch would never become a subdivision and gave a financial boost to the family's ability to maintain what they hold dear. In 1995, Elin established a ranch to plate enterprise selling grass-finished beef which was rebranded as Sangres Best in 2010. In 2020 she was recognized for her stewardship of the land by the Custer County Conservation District with the Conservationist of the Year award. In 2022 Palmer Land Trust gave her their Lifetime Achievement Award.



SAN ISABEL

Elevation 8,514'

Few people know that the history of public lands being used for hiking, camping and fishing had its beginnings right here in Custer County. The Forest Service became a federal agency in 1905, and for years its main function was to accommodate the mining and timber industries.

In 1919, a Forest Service employee, Arthur Carhart, determined that these vast national forests might have another calling. He visited sites throughout the Western U.S., and ultimately decided to pursue his "experiment" in what is now the San Isabel National Forest in eastern Custer County.

In Squirrel Creek Canyon, near the town of Beulah, Carhart developed campsites, fire pits and privy toilets, and these improvements attracted visitors from the outset. Carhart developed additional roads and other improvements. With the Great Depression came various public work projects – the Works Progress Administration, the Civilian Conservation Corps and others – and all of the sudden there were legions of workers available to make improvements on public lands.

In the late 1930s, Lake Isabel was developed in eastern Custer County. It was the first time a lake had been created solely for recreation. Forest Service officials soon recognized Carhart's efforts, and in a

document stated that Carhart's recreation plan for the San Isabel National Forest, "was far ahead of its time and served as a blueprint for forest recreation planning across the nation."

Today, some of those early WPA and CCC improvements can be spotted around Lake Isabel, at the Pueblo Mountain Park near Beulah, and in the Ophir Creek and Davenport Campgrounds in eastern Custer County. Carhart's legacy and his vision continue to live on at every Forest Service campground and picnic site in America. And it all had its beginnings right here in Custer County.

Mingus Homestead CO-165 north of Ophir Creek Rd, San Isabel NF, Beulah
1990 National Register of Historic Places

This circa 1913 collection of buildings is an excellent example of an early 20th century high country homestead that is located in the San Isabel National Forest. The cabin has been renovated and filled with period-specific furniture and antiques and can be rented from recreation.gov for a unique experience.



▲ PRESENT Lake Isabel



▼ PRESENT Mingus Homestead



Unsurpassed scenery, clean air, spectacular skies – Custer County amenities. Another, infrequently mentioned, is wild edibles. Tiny strawberries and raspberries; gooseberries – dangerous to gather. Ground hornets often share the berries' thick, debris-tangled environment. (Enough said.) Pinon nuts and chokecherry jellies and syrup are Nature's treat, but a fruit, seldom used, is red elderberry. In early days it was believed to be toxic. Still, a few hardy pioneers made delicious, clear, red jelly from the fruit. Recent writings conclude that the seed, not the juice, is poisonous. Once, when a young girl told her grandmother, an old-time jelly maker, that red elderberries are toxic, the old woman responded, "Nonsense! If that were true, we'd both be dead!" Good point!

— Willdra Walker Ruzanski



SPECIAL PLACES

in the Wet Mountain Valley



▲ **PRESENT** The Rainbow Trail offers great hiking as well as fantastic valley views

PAST ▶ Construction crew at the building of the DeWeese Dam, June 1904

Rainbow Trail At just over 101 miles long the Rainbow Trail spans four counties – Saguache, Chaffee, Fremont and Custer – and ends at the Huerfano County border. The earliest accounts put the initial Rainbow construction beginning in 1912 and completed by 1930. The San Isabel National Forest was established in 1912 with offices in Westcliffe and La Veta. Initially the Trail was built to provide easier access for cattle to high mountain meadows and to gain easier access for fishing the high mountain lakes, many of which already had primitive trails leading to them. Another use of the Trail was horseback wildfire patrol.

Lake DeWeese Dall DeWeese and C.R.C. Dye incorporated the DeWeese-Dye Ditch and Reservoir Company and in 1902 they started construction on a dam northeast of Westcliffe. During the 1930s there were two six foot additions to the top of the dam to enlarge the lake and store more water. The top twelve feet of the dam was reconstructed and the work completed in 1999.



▼ **PRESENT** Alpine Lodge is a favorite local dining spot



▲ **PAST** A buggy navigating Hardscrabble in 1892

Mountain Passes Hermit Pass at 13,040' is one of Colorado's highest passes accessible to four wheel drive vehicles, though only from the east. Music Pass was traveled by Indians and mountain men but was never popular. Venable, Three Step and Comanche Passes were mainly horseback trails. Hardscrabble is an ancient Indian trail and a major route for early travelers.

Alpine Lodge 6848 CR 140

Alpine Lodge has historically maintained its history as a "lodge nestled in the pines of the Colorado Rockies." It began in the early 1920's as a dude ranch for men and women. In 1946 it became a lodge/eating place; burned to the ground in 1954 and was rebuilt in 1956. In 1965 it opened as a public restaurant with lodging in Alvarado Campground; adding living quarters and cabins in 1972 through 1978. It has gone through extensive remodeling and building additions since then, becoming the majestic Alpine Lodge nestled at the base of the Sangre de Cristo mountains with stunning views of the Wet Mountain Valley. It is the place to go for memorable dinners and Sunday Brunch. In addition, it has some of the best hiking trails in the region within a half mile.

◀ **PAST** A peaceful day of fishing at Lake DeWeese 1920s

PIONEER CEMETERIES

of Yesteryear

Rare wildflowers, prairie grass, tumbleweeds, sagebrush and ornamental wrought iron fences dot the 200-year-old pioneer cemeteries of Custer County. Are they haunted? We'll let you decide for yourself...

Established	Cemetery	Location
1870	Hope Lutheran	Colony Road, south of Westcliffe
1870s	Rosita	Rosita Road and Keepsake Loop
1872	Ula	2091 CR 170
1878	Silver Cliff	CO-96 and Mill St
1881	The Assumption	110 CR 340



THE BLUE LIGHTS
The Blue Lights of the Silver Cliff Cemetery continue to amaze and fascinate anyone fortunate enough to observe these phenomena, documented in National Geographic magazine in 1969. These elusive lights are occasionally visible, dancing over the grave stones on cloudy nights. The cause of these lights remains unknown, although they were first observed in about 1875.



Hope Lutheran Cemetery, Manzel Family Gravestones on the right



Silver Cliff Cemetery, Schoolfield Family Gravestones



Elton and Elsie Beckwith marker at Ula Cemetery



DeGree Family Gravestones at The Assumption Cemetery have permanent flowers placed in their memory



Wrought iron sign constructed in 1870 marks the Rosita Cemetery entrance



PEACEKEEPERS

of Custer County

Custer County Sheriff's Office 702 Rosita Ave

Established in 1877, the Sheriff's Office has always had a strong emphasis on Community Relations.

2022-Present	Lloyd R. Smith
2015-2021	Shannon K. Byerly
1987-2014	Fred Jobe
1979-1986	Robert Baker
1959-1978	Sanford DePriest
1949-1958	Fred W. Squire
1941-1948	James H. Isabell
1935-1940	Chas H. Jones
4/1934-12/1934	Lige Manning
1929-3/1934	Mel N. Manning
1927-1928	Thomas Hugg
1913-1926	Mel N. Manning
1911-1912	H.M. Williams
1909-1910	Dorsey N. Garnier
1906-1908	H. W. Hendershoh
4/1898-1905	James A. Ryan
1896-4/1898	W. E. Merriam
1892-1895	John Chetelet
1888-1891	W. F. Carr
1884-1887	W. L. Knight
1879-1883	W. D. Schoolfield
1877-1878	H. T. Blake

Lloyd R. Smith
Shannon K. Byerly
Fred Jobe
Robert Baker
Sanford DePriest
Fred W. Squire
James H. Isabell
Chas H. Jones
Lige Manning
Mel N. Manning
Thomas Hugg
Mel N. Manning
H.M. Williams
Dorsey N. Garnier
H. W. Hendershoh
James A. Ryan
W. E. Merriam
John Chetelet
W. F. Carr
W. L. Knight
W. D. Schoolfield
H. T. Blake

NEWSPAPERS

serving Custer County



Custer County has had 20+ newspapers

The *Rosita Index* was the first newspaper in 1875, followed by the *Silver Cliff Miner* in 1878, and the *Daily Prospector* in 1879. The *Wet Mountain Tribune* began publication in 1883.

Alexander H. Lacy, editor and proprietor of the *Wet Mountain Tribune*, earned the title of Pioneer Editor of Custer County. In more recent times,

In early days folks often took the law into their own hands. Claim jumpers and cattle rustlers were sometimes served up justice at the end of a rope. Lesser crimes were dealt with less harshly and in unique ways. Case in point: Wood was consistently being stolen from a Westcliffe family's woodpile. Unable to catch the thief, the man of the house drilled holes in several pieces of wood, filled them with blasting powder and disguised them with bark. A day later, a horrendous explosion occurred in a neighbor's house, blowing lids off the stove, shattering a window, and slightly injuring the lady building the fire. No more wood was pilfered; cause of the explosion was unsolved. Neither party contacted the sheriff as both had technically broken the law, nor would either family claim any knowledge about the incident. Problem solved... and the families remained friends.

— Willdra Walker Ruzanski

Custer County Courthouse 205 S 6th St

Westcliffe became the county seat in 1928 and the courthouse was built in 1929.



PRESENT ▶
Custer County Courthouse



PAST ▶
Courthouse, 1950s



the editors/publishers have been Myron Alexander (1935-1943), Ray DeWall (1943-1956), Joe Payton (1956-1973), Bob Cruzen (1973-1981), Jim Little (1981-2018) and Jordan Hedberg (2018-present).

Today the *Wet Mountain Tribune* serves the community and is the county's oldest non-ranching commercial venture.

MAKING TRACKS

in Westcliffe

All Aboard Westcliffe 110 Rosita Ave

The Denver and Rio Grande Railroad extended a rail line into the Wet Mountain Valley in 1881 to take advantage of Silver Cliff's mining boom. The line ended one mile west of Silver Cliff at a new depot, around which Wet Mountain Valley residents built Westcliffe, a true railroad town.

The mining camps and the railroad are now gone, but the town of Westcliffe survives along with All Aboard Westcliffe, a collection of buildings with historic artifacts and memorabilia showcasing Custer County's rich railroad history. A large replica depot on Rosita Street serves as All Aboard Westcliffe's headquarters and a community meeting space, while a 1901 single stall engine house next door is a museum.

The Westcliffe Depot on Main Street, was originally at the heart of the transportation of goods and of tourism to the Wet Mountain Valley. After the railroad discontinued service, the building served both as a residence and businesses until it was obtained through a collaborative effort of the Colorado State Historical Foundation, All Aboard Westcliffe, the Town of Westcliffe and concerned individuals in 2013. A full restoration of its 1920s decor was completed by 2018.

▼ **PAST** Westcliffe Depot, early 1900s



Denver & Rio Grande Train Depot 102 Main St

Constructed in 1901-1902, this was Westcliffe's second depot which served the community until 1938. The original depot burned in 1886. While typical of other combination depots in rural Colorado, this wood frame building is differentiated by Craftsman decorative elements. The setting is further strengthened by railroad structures that remain nearby, most notably the renovated engine house.

Denver & Rio Grande Engine House
110 Rosita Ave

1993 *State Register of Historic Places*

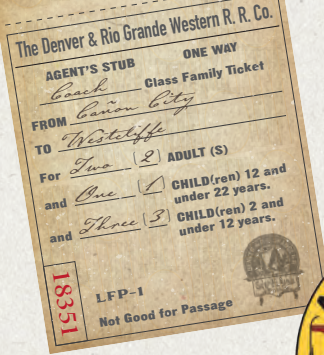
Constructed in 1901, the engine house served the Westcliffe terminus of the branch line from Texas Creek. Few historic engine houses of any type still survive in Colorado, and engine houses were not commonly built on branch lines. This example of a single stall branch line engine house is particularly rare.



▲ **PRESENT** D&RG Caboose 0825 built in 1881



◀ **PAST**
Replication of D&RG Ticket Stub, late 1800s



▼ **PRESENT**
All Aboard Westcliffe Engine House



▲ **PRESENT**
Interior of the All Aboard Westcliffe Engine House

◀ **PRESENT**
All Aboard Westcliffe Event Center on Rosita Ave

WALKING TOUR

Elevation 7,867' – Westcliffe



◀ **PAST**
Anne K. Relph, circa
1950s publicity still

Jones Theater 119 Main St

The Jones Theater began as a saloon and pool hall in the 1800s, where thirsty miners would come to spend the money they earned from the silver lodes in nearby Silver Cliff and Rosita. The saloon's builder, Casper Klutz, chose to build in the part of town known as Dutch Row.

In the 1920s, June Canda, a Westcliffe man, purchased the building and began showing movies. The tradition of showing silent movies and later "talkies" to folks at the Canda Theater continued for many years. Canda ran the movie house until his death in 1963, when his wife Catherine took over. A year later, heavy snowfall collapsed a portion of the roof, forcing her to close and sell the theater to the Jones family.

Lawrence and Louise Jones were ranchers looking for a way to make some extra money. They purchased the theater in 1964 and changed the name to the Jones

Theater and showed films for the next seven years, until they sold the building to Iris and Dick Wilson who ran the business for nine years.

In 1980, dentist Lee Schambach bought the building and added an office and apartment to the existing structure. When he retired in 1992, Hollywood

actress Anne Relph saved the theater from becoming a laundromat and added live theater to the mix and the Westcliffe Center for the Performing Arts was born.

▼ **PRESENT** Dixie K. Clare's hand-painted 2003 mural shows the original Canda Theater Marquee. See the beautiful mural yourself on the east side of the Jones Theater building on N 2nd St.



▲ **PRESENT** The Historic Jones Theater on Main St



Feed Store 116 N 2nd St

Built and moved from the Beddoes Ranch near the Hillside community in the 1880s, this three-story post and beam building was a gathering place for ranchers. The building was renovated in the 1980s by then owner Garrett Carlson and later renovated again to create residential and commercial space. Carlson was also responsible for over 1,000 trees planted in the creation of the amphitheater and park. Today the Feed Store is a popular gathering space to listen to live music, have food and drink, and enjoy a local landmark.

▼ **PRESENT** Feed Store



Wolff Building 201 S 2nd St

1987 National Register of Historic Places

This 1887 two-story brick building was built by William Wolff, a Westcliffe pioneer. Throughout the years it has been known as the Hard Times Hotel, National Hotel and Wolff Hotel. The building has served as a hotel boarding house, restaurant, saloon, billiard and gambling hall, market, ice cream parlor and most recently is open to the public as a health day spa. It was Westcliffe's first hotel and is the only remaining stone front building in town.

PRESENT ▶
Wolff Building



Blacksmith/Forge/Livery 118 Rosita Ave

In 1905 August Menzel established a blacksmith shop, livery and lumber yard and sold farm implements from this building. *Privately owned.*

▼ **PRESENT** Milk Shed/Creamery



Milk Shed/Creamery 114 Rosita Ave

Circa 1899: Located behind the livery and near the train tracks, this structure was where local ranching families supplemented their income by selling bulk milk and making cheese. *Privately owned.*

Westcliffe Jail 116 N 2nd St

1993 National Register of Historic Places

The calaboose, built in 1888 at a cost of \$330, is constructed of locally-collected fieldstone by stonemason Archie Scherer, also responsible for the Westcliff School. The building served as an incarceration facility until the mid-1920s to provide a cool, dry resting place for many a cowboy who whooped it up on Dutch Row. The less than comfortable conditions guaranteed that repeat guests were a rarity. Today, the door remains unlocked. *Privately owned.*



◀ **PRESENT** Blacksmith/Forge/Livery

▼ **PRESENT** Grandma's House marks Dutch Row



Grandma's House 118 Main St

Built in 1900 and originally owned by the Eddy's, then later known as Canda Hall, this solid and imposing building over the years housed a pool hall, dance hall, theater, grocery stores and cold storage lockers. When owned by the Eddy's, there would be dances upstairs on Saturday nights. Across the street was another dance hall called the Rey. To attract dancers to the Eddy House, Wilber Eddy and Hazel Walker, both about age 12, would dance in front of the windows to make people in the streets believe there was a lot going on upstairs. It was a thriving place for socializing and entertaining until a wind storm blew the roof off. The building now houses apartments and commercial space.



The 2nd floor of Grandma's House was a dance hall – perfect setting for human drama. Once, an aging business man, given name George (locally famous for his impeccably styled heavy dark hair), got into a physical altercation with another elderly gentleman on the outside platform above the iron stairway. Amused, a schoolboy, and a few other spectators, watched the inebriated combatants feebly push, shove and deliver occasional blows, until George fell backward to tumble down the stairs and land at the bottom in a heap. When he raised his head, the stairway light illuminated a gleaming, white path of skull where a thick, black thatch of hair had been. "You've scalped old George," the horrified boy yelled. George rose to his knees and crawled around, desperately searching for and retrieving his elegant toupee. Slapping the hairpiece on his head, he struggled to his feet and limped off into the night.

— Willdra Walker Ruzanski

◀ **PRESENT**
Westcliffe Jail

DUTCH ROW

Named for the many German owned businesses originally located on South 2nd St, Dutch Row became popular with cowboys hired on the Valley ranches.

Saloons and brothels soon replaced the more reputable establishments.

Cowboys reportedly enjoying shooting out the lights of the saloons from horseback, and this may be why Dutch Row burned to the ground twice.

The legend of its second burning concerns drunken cowboys who formed a bucket brigade to fight the fire. But a water fight seemed to be more fun, so the cowboys played while Dutch Row burned.

WALKING TOUR

Elevation 7,867' – Westcliffe



OF NOTE
Many buildings on the 200 block of Main Street in downtown Westcliffe were constructed by purchasing an “easement” on the walls of a neighboring building. The narrow lots, 25 feet wide, required creative construction practices for stores to utilize as much space as possible. These easements allowed roofs to overlap and the walls to be shared, but that made renovations of each building difficult.

▼ **PRESENT** 307 Main St



200 Main St

Old Jennings Market, built in 1909, housed the first high school on the upper floor and also showed movies even before the “talkies.” Later the building housed several businesses and is now a spacious retail shop.

201 Main St

The original Westcliffe Bank building, built in 1899, was the town’s first bank, and its vault remains intact. The old bank was used as a set for the film *Comes A Horseman*. It housed the *Wet Mountain Tribune* newspaper before becoming a real estate office.

205 Main St

Like many Westcliffe buildings, this was rolled down the street on logs from its previous location in Silver Cliff. A large beam in the basement commemorates the occasion with a wood burned name and date – “George Zeigler 1887.” It is one of the oldest buildings in Custer County.

207 Main St

Circa 1893: The building housed the post office on one side and a barber shop on the other. Later, it become the popular Susie’s Cafe, owned by Susie Loafman. It has been the home of Wet Mountain Treasures since 2005.

209 Main St

Circa 1899: In 1943 Mrs. Dorothea Tinkham gave this building to the women of Custer County as a place to convene when in town. The building housed the library from 1943 to 1989. Renovated as an addition to the library, the building continues as a community meeting place.

PAST ► Owner/editor of the *Wet Mountain Tribune*, Philip Doyle and a colleague stand outside 307 Main St in 1910



▲ **PAST** Main Street, Westcliffe circa 1929

211 Main St

Circa 1880s: Built as a general merchandise and hardware store by J.P. Falkenberg who was a member of the German Colony that settled in the Valley in 1870.

216 Main St

In the 1920s, the automobile increased tourism to the Valley, with many visitors lured here by the extensive federally funded trail system developed in the Sangre de Cristos in the 1930s. Built circa 1925, this was one of the first service stations in Westcliffe, and today houses business offices.

305 Main St

Circa 1887: This building, which was moved from Silver Cliff, served at one time as the Fire Department before becoming the Town Hall and Masonic Lodge through 2018 and then became a retail shop.

307 Main St

Circa 1880s: This building was once the office of the *Wet Mountain Tribune* and now houses a retail shop.



◀ **PAST** 216 Main St was once the home of Hansen Filling Station and Garage

101-111 N 3rd St

Toad Motel Row Cabins, likely built in the late 1930s, is a great example of our early “motels.” Each small building was a separate little cabin. The sign outside proclaimed “Toad Motel – Kids with Warts Stay Free.” The row is now a popular corner with retail shops.



◀ **PRESENT** Menzel Home

Menzel Home 104 S 3rd St

Circa 1900: Originally the home of August and Vera Menzel (grandson of German Colonist August Menzel), the home also housed the Menzel Funeral Parlor from 1923 to 1970. *Privately owned.*

Corner 4th & Main St

Built in 1886, the Westcliffe Hotel was the largest in the community – offering 12 rooms on the second floor and dining on the first floor. In the late 1900s it was destroyed by a fire and the site is now Jess Price Park, named for Westcliffe’s former mayor from 2002-2009.



◀ **PAST** This historic image of the Westcliffe Hotel was taken by Minnie Lowe, the same photographer as our cover image



◀ **PRESENT** Jess Price Park

Mercier House 215 S 6th St

1996 *State Register of Historic Places*

The circa 1898 Mercier House is significant as a residential example of the work of Archie Scherer, an early Westcliffe stonemason. Scherer, who was known for his skillful use of local fieldstone and for his attention to detail, also built Westcliffe Jail and Westcliff School. *Privately owned.*

Canda House 411 Main St

Circa 1920: The original home of Cary and Catherine (Merriam) Canda, this restored building now houses several businesses. The Canda family owned Canda Hall (Grandmas’s House) and the Canda Theater (Jones Theater) and were very prominent in local civic affairs. The home now houses retail shops.

Beardsley House 501 Main St

Circa 1893: Originally owned by George Beardsley Sr., this home was restored to its original splendor and for a time served as a charming bed & breakfast. George Sr., his son George Jr., and daughter Pauline, were bankers in Westcliffe. *Privately owned.*

▼ **PRESENT** Mercier House



▼ **PRESENT** Canda House



▼ **PRESENT** Beardsley House



MOVIES

made in Custer County



Hollywood Comes to Town

The first movie filmed in the Valley was the silent film *Twisted Tales* starring Tom Mix and Bessie Exton in 1916. The Draper family had helped with local arrangements for movie companies since the 1950s when MGM came to Custer County to film *Vengeance Valley* on the Mountain Meadows Ranch, owned by the Everhart family. Scenes from *Cat Ballou* were shot on the Brandenburg family ranch and scenes in *Saddle the Wind* were shot in the Rosita area.

1951 *Vengeance Valley*: Burt Lancaster, Robert Walker, Joanne Dru

1954 *The Outcast*: John Derek, Joan Evans, Jim Davis

1958 *Saddle the Wind*: Robert Taylor, Julie London, John Cassavetes



1962 *How the West was Won*: John Wayne, James Stewart, Henry Fonda, Gregory Peck

1965 *Cat Ballou*: Lee Marvin, Jane Fonda

1969 *Then Came Bronson*: Michael Parks, Bonnie Bedelia

1970 *Barquero*: Lee Van Cleef, Warren Oates

1976 *The Duchess and the Dirtwater Fox*: Goldie Hawn, George Segal

1977 *The White Buffalo*: Charles Bronson, Kim Novak, Will Sampson

1978 *Comes a Horseman*: James Caan, Jane Fonda, Jason Robards

1981 *Continental Divide*: John Belushi, Blair Brown

1991 *Conagher*: Sam Elliot, Katharine Ross

Several Marlboro commercials were also filmed here!



LEARN MORE

THE VOICE

of the Wet Mountain Valley

KLZR Radio 91.7 – Community Powered

It is unusual for a community our size to have a radio station. KLZR's journey began in 2001 when a group of community members applied for a Low Power FM (100 Watts) license from the FCC. In May of 2004 KWMV 95.7 FM hit the airways. In 2015 a full power license became available, and the station morphed into KLZR 91.7 FM broadcasting at 6000 Watts. KLZR

broadcasts 24/7 with 23 DJs, a library of 50,000+ songs, a daily news program during the week and a community calendar. Over the years KLZR has become central to the community, hosting the High Peaks Music Festival, Rock n' Soul Jam, Taste of the Valley along with free Summer in the Park concerts and the 2nd Street Block Parties.



HEAVENS ABOVE

the Wet Mountain Valley

Our magnificent dark skies reveal the astonishing cosmos we are a part of. The stars and constellations, including our sun, drove the calendars of when to plant, where to migrate and our relationship to life. Our archaeological sites and records document the interwoven dependence and celebrations of our relationship to the earth and other celestial bodies.

Experiencing the night sky provides perspective and inspiration, and leads us to reflect on our humanity and place in the universe. The history of scientific discovery and even human curiosity itself is indebted to the natural night sky. Without the natural night sky, we could not have navigated the globe.

In the Wet Mountain Valley, we are fortunate to be able to see the beauty and wonder of the night sky that the early settlers saw before us. We owe our certified dark skies in large part to rancher and former owner of the Beckwith Ranch, Suzanne "Smokey" Jack.

When she saw the light domes forming over Colorado Springs and Pueblo she also saw that the solution was simple – shine lights on the ground where needed, but not up in the sky.

In 2015, Silver Cliff and Westcliffe were recognized by the International Dark-Sky Association as the ninth International Dark Sky Community in the world; the first in Colorado and with an elevation of almost 7,900 feet, the nearest to the heavens!

We hope you enjoy the spectacular dark sky our forebears experienced. We are grateful to the people who help us protect the night by using smart dark-sky friendly lighting to help minimize glare while reducing light pollution and skyglow in our nighttime environment. We embrace the darkness of the night and greatly appreciate our starry nights as a treasure that twinkles high overhead in the Wet Mountain Valley.

PRESENT ►
The Smokey Jack Observatory



▼ PAST Suzanne "Smokey" Jack, 1946-2004



CREDITS

and Contributions

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Visitor Information Contact the Welcome Center at 719-480-7230 or online at VisitWetMountainValley.com



LEARN MORE



CUSTER COUNTY PAST & PRESENT

Custer County's 730 square miles are packed with extensive natural beauty, over 444 miles of maintained hiking trails, scores of alpine lakes, a night scape dome of protected dark skies, around 5,000 contented residents... and a human legacy stretching over millennia.

From mastodon-hunting ancients, to nomadic native tribes who have left their marks here, to Spanish conquistadors, to fur trappers and explorers, all have had good reason to relish the treasures of this high mountain valley.

When the first Euro-American settlers arrived in the Wet Mountain Valley over 150 years ago, there were vast opportunities and challenges awaiting. Miners, farmers and ranchers were joined by other hard working merchants, teachers, railroaders, and entrepreneurs determined to establish a sustainable way of life in the midst of alpine splendor and wide valley vistas.

And so it remains today, rich in legacy, vitality, and promise. Ranching continues to be an important element of the local economy, while mining and railroads are memorialized in parks and museums. The livery stables and blacksmith shops have been replaced by art galleries, gift shops and specialty coffee shops and cafes in the towns' business districts. Tourists and visitors find nothing wanting, and some are drawn to the Valley's designated Dark Sky Community,

the first in Colorado, the ninth in the world, and still the highest elevation Dark Sky Community anywhere. From the Bluff Park, daylight views include the sweep of the Sangre de Cristo peaks and the fertile valley floor; at night the Smokey Jack Observatory provides viewing a night scape of the solar system and the Milky Way galaxy.

While some of the villages' and forest's appearances have changed over the years, for residents here the Western sense of self-reliance within the vastness of wilderness and community building still defines Custer County.

Occasional severe weather, distance from major urban areas, and the unpredictability of financial wellbeing are all challenges to life in Custer County. Yet residents meet them with gusto, and even include population growth, water and land stewardship, and peaceful cooperative living with their sense of welcome responsibility. Custer County is one of the few places left in America where the natural landscape has changed little, and modern life has melded so well with the past.

We can't know what Custer County will be like in a decade or a century from now. But if the perseverance of good communal instincts and the creativity of residents continue as they have in the past, it will most likely be as special a place then as it is now.

— Wayne Ewing