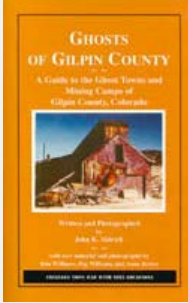


Ghosts of Gilpin County: A Guide to the Ghost Towns and Mining Camps of Gilpin County, Colorado

Submitted by jainlayconley on 11-15-2009 03:21 PM



Author: John K. Aldrich

Publishing: Denver, CO: Columbine Ink, LLC, 2008. Photos, map, bibliography. viii + 43 pages. 5-1/2" x 8-1/2". Paperback.

Reviewer: Lew Cady

Nobody ever packed as many fascinating facts about Gilpin County into so few (40) pages of text. It's appropriate that Gilpin County's story be small. After all, in terms of square miles, it's Colorado's second smallest county (after Broomfield). Yes, the addition of Denver International Airport has made Denver larger than Gilpin.

Highlights of *Ghosts of Gilpin County* include an excellent quick course in mining and milling processes, a useful map of Gilpin's mining camps, and thumbnail sketches of twenty of those mining camps. They ranged from the well known (Central City and Black Hawk) to the gone-but-not-quite-forgotten (Antelope and Missouri Flats).

There are shortcomings. A discussion of the Cornish dry-stack rock walls, which are found throughout the county, would have been welcome. In the section on Mountain City, the description of how John Gregory came to discover gold is sound, but the date of discovery has been disputed. Chocolate Dan Monroe, a Central City historian, has done extensive research indicating that the actual discovery was made weeks before the generally accepted date of May 6, 1859.

The thumbnail coverage of Central City, Gilpin County's most important mining camp, should have employed a larger thumbnail. The story would have been more complete if it discussed Central's rich newspaper history. The February 27, 2009, demise of the *Rocky Mountain News* left the *Weekly Register-Call* as Colorado's oldest newspaper. The Central City Opera's commission of *The Ballad of Baby Doe*, one of the most produced operas on an American subject, also deserved mention.

The author also overlooks the real significance of the Fire of 1874: it led to reconstructing the original wooden city in brick and stone. Oddly there is no mention of Clara Brown, the former slave who became a successful businesswoman and financed the western emigration of other former slaves. Also missing is any discussion of the prevalent yellow Harrison roses and their colorful history. The Glory Hole, the largest open pit gold mine in the region, also deserved coverage. Also missing: mention of Central's nickname, "The Richest Square Mile on Earth."

The author reports the recent move of the Lace House to its new home on Gregory Street. On page 18 the author correctly observes that "Black Hawk is the scene of large gambling resorts, and Central City features generally smaller operations (and more historic buildings)." However, Aldrich is behind the times in stating that the Central City Opera House seats 750. In 1999, the rickety old chairs were replaced by

comfortable theater seating and the capacity dropped to 550, which happens to be the city's current year-round population.

Many stories have been told about Herndon Davis's painting of the "The Face on the Barroom Floor" in the Teller House Bar. Aldrich's is not one I've heard before. Perhaps he relied too much on Caroline Bancroft's famous amalgam of fact and fiction (all passed off as fact). Alan Granruth's excellent books, *Mining Gold to Mining Wallets* (1999) and *The Little Kingdom of Gilpin* (2000), are better sources. Another valuable recent history is Roger Baker's carefully researched *Black Hawk: The Rise and Fall of a Colorado Mill Town* (2005).

Reviewer Info:

Lew Cady fell in love with Central City and Gilpin County over fifty years ago and has been publishing *The Little Kingdom Come*—an irregularly published newspaper—in Central since 1970.

