

# The Louisville Historian

Issue #66

A Publication of the Louisville Historical Commission and Society

Spring 2005

## OLD-TIME, OLD-TOWN GARDENS

Susan Spaulding, Horticulture & Forestry Advisory Board

Bridget Bacon, Museum Coordinator

**I**f it didn't give back, it didn't grow." That's how a Louisville native describes how early residents decided what to plant in their yards. Looking back at how land was used illuminates the values and the heritage of the first residents of Louisville. Today, a walk through the town's streets and alleys reveals remnants of gardens and outbuildings unique to Louisville, with its history of seasonal coal mining and its settlement by European immigrants, especially those from Italy, who brought with them a strong sense of practicality and resourcefulness.

The semi-arid climate of the Front Range allowed people to use their yards year-round, as more-or-less extensions of their indoor living space. Characteristic to historic Louisville yards were large vegetable gardens, fruit trees and grape vines, shaped evergreens and hedges, tidy iron or wood fences and various outbuildings and structures, including outhouses, coal sheds, chicken coops, bread ovens and ash pits. Ornamental plants and trees were also used, but were often used to enhance a primarily functional yard area.

Coal mining played a large role in shaping Louisville gardens. Unlike hard coal from most other coal mining areas of the United States, the soft coal mined from Colorado's northern fields disintegrated if not used within a few weeks. Thus, the mines typically closed in the summer, when the coal market shrank. Without summer income, the miners of Louisville and their families relied on large vegetable gardens to feed themselves. Vegetables known to grow in those gardens included peppers, tomatoes, green beans, fava beans, peas, garlic, cucumbers, carrots, zucchini, corn, lettuce, endive, parsley, celery, and cabbage. Such gardens were well-watered, usually by shallow wells tapped into the underground water that flows through downtown Louisville. Even today, some old-town homes still have useable wells in their backyards. Many Louisville women canned what fruits and vegetables they could, and families supplemented their summer income selling

any extra produce.

The design and use of its yards and gardens strongly reflect the European origins of Louisville's early settlers. The first immigrants, primarily of English, Scottish and German heritage, were soon followed by many Italian families as well as immigrants from France and Eastern Europe. Parts of Louisville even became known as Little Italy and Frenchtown. Many of these immigrants were familiar with fruit trees in the old country, and fruit trees

became an important source of food for newly arrived immigrant families. Plum, apple, peach, cherry, apricot and walnut trees are all known to have flourished in Louisville's old-town, and many of those original trees survive today. In fact, Louisville's City Forester, Chris Lichty, has observed that in his twenty-five years working with plants, he has never seen an apple tree as large as a forty-foot tall specimen still thriving in a yard on Walnut Street. Strawberries and raspberries were also grown. Most surprisingly, figs were cultivated, with elaborate winter protection.

With a large Italian population, grape vines became an important feature in many old-town gardens. Many families fermented and bottled their own wine. Original grape vines – old, though not old in grape years – can still be seen on trellises around town.

Some outbuildings from Louisville's early days still survive in old-town yards. Although many are in disrepair, they remind us of a time when people used every bit of yard for some useful purpose. Sometimes owners of larger lots built cottages in the back to house addi-



*In this undated historic photo, Frank Jordinelli stands in his large vegetable garden on LaFarge Avenue.*

*Continued on page 2*

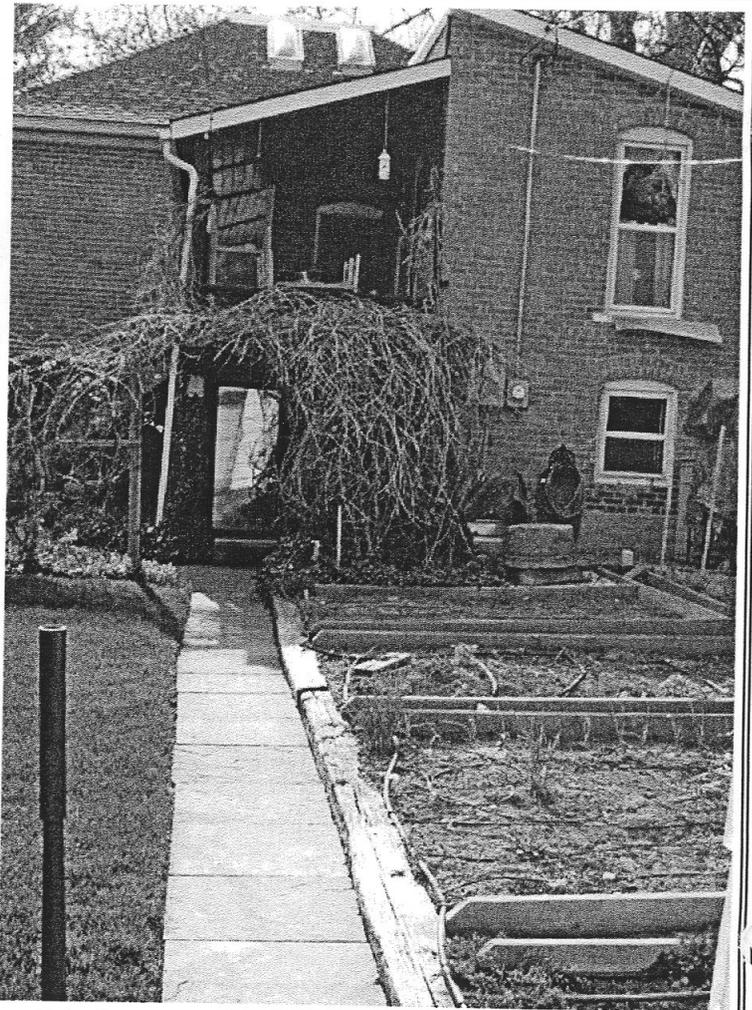
*Continued from page 1*

tional family members. Outhouses were still being used into the 1950's. Sheds were important for storing coal, as well as tools and other items. Many residents raised chickens and rabbits for food; some even kept pigs in their backyards. Ash pits, situated near alleys for easy cleanup, were used not only for dumping ashes from coal stoves but also for burning trash. Summer kitchens, such as the one by the Jordinelli House at the Museum, were reportedly common. Some families built bread ovens in their yards, where women made enough loaves of bread at one time to last their families for a week. By the reports of Louisville residents who grew up eating crusty bread baked in an outdoor bread oven, that bread was the best bread they have ever tasted. Remnant straight concrete walks from the back door to the outhouse or the ash pit can still be found in some Louisville yards.

The Italian settlers brought their unique and ancient heritage of garden design with them. Characteristics of Italian design are orderly, geometric layout and clean lines, the emphasis of structure over color, and the sense of bringing order to the wild and natural. Many of Louisville's old yards retain this feeling of order and tidiness, in contrast to the contained chaos of English-type borders. In Louisville, a smattering of the typical Italian tightly pruned and shaped evergreens and hedges still remain. Most unique to Louisville's present look are the many old Dwarf Alberta Spruce, some of whose conical forms now top seven feet tall. Louisville residents in particular made unique use of these Alberta Spruce, using them as "street trees" now seen all over old-town.

A curious observer can find very old rock walls still standing, made from flagstone probably from now-closed Boulder County quarries, along with old wood fences delineating property lines and a few remaining vintage iron fences. (The iron fence in front of the Museum's Tomeo House was originally in the front yard of the Austin-Niehoff House at 717 Main Street, one of the oldest buildings in Louisville.)

Although many of Louisville's yards first and foremost produced food for the families of out-of-work miners, people did give up space for shade and ornamental trees and flowering shrubs and perennials. Until the 1950's, many more trees grew in the downtown area than do today, and some very old



*John Leary and Jan Rowen, who own the LaFarge Avenue house that once belonged to Joseph and Philomena Jannucci, have kept the yard's vegetable garden and grape vine.*

blue spruce and ash trees are still around. Old lilacs continue to bloom every spring, as well as the occasional old-fashioned snowball tree. Roses, hollyhocks and irises were typical in flower beds.

Our town's historic yards and gardens have unique characteristics that reveal Louisville's roots. Like old-town Louisville's modest houses, the yards that went with them were small-scale but designed for practicality and intensely used. The people who built and maintained these yards were hardworking, self-reliant, resourceful and productive. Take an evening this spring or summer to stroll and see what insights you might have into Louisville's rich garden heritage.

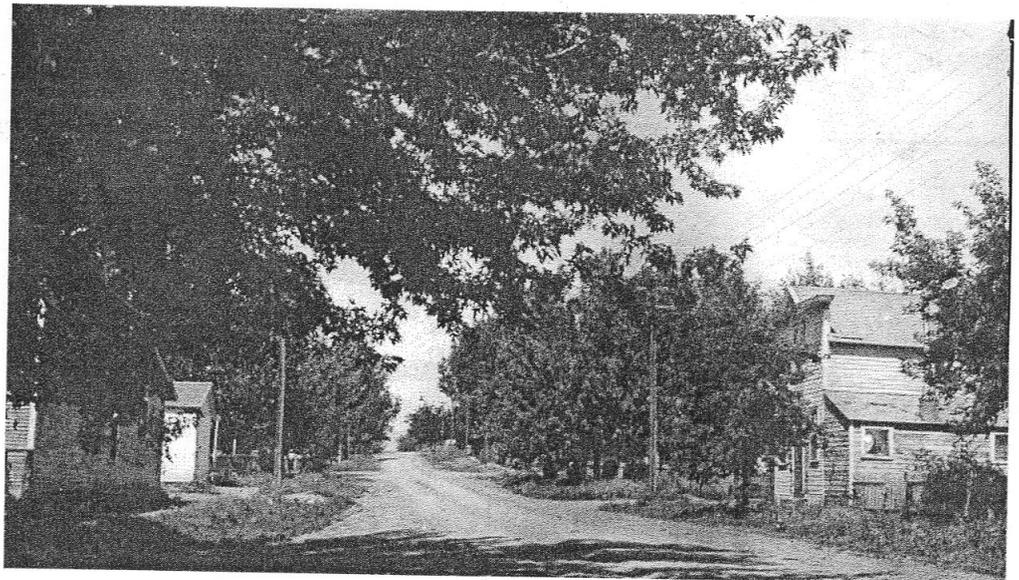
*Susan is a landscape designer with GE Enterprises, Inc. in Dacono and chair of the Horticultural and Forestry Advisory Board. Bridget is the Museum Coordinator.*

## ***NEW PICTURES FROM THE MUSEUM***



*Front Street, circa 1912*

*Short Street Looking West from Main Street, circa 1910s*



## ***HOW WELL DO YOU KNOW LOUISVILLE?***

1. What is the name of the mine located at the site of Karen's in the Country restaurant?
2. How many times larger is Louisville's current population than it was in 1960?  
(Choose from 3, 6, 9, or 12 times larger.)
3. In what year did the Louisville Historical Museum open?

*The answers appear on page 7.*

## ***JOHN ROSS VISITS THE TOMEO HOUSE, HIS CHILDHOOD HOME***

The Tomeo House at the Historical Museum is a historic home treasure that allows us to show visitors how people used to live in Louisville. Built around 1904, this 600-square-foot house has only three rooms and never has had running water. On April 17, we received a visit from John Ross, whose family lived in the Tomeo House for seventeen years from 1924 to 1941. The family's name was originally Rossi. John visited the Museum with his wife, Martha Coet Ross (the Coets also having been a Louisville family), and their extended family of children and grandchildren.

Amazingly, a total of seven people (John; his mother, Grace DiGiacomo Ross; his three brothers, Guy, Dan, and Frank; and his two sisters, Mary and Rose) made this modest house their home. John, the youngest child, lived in it from the ages of 3 to 20.

The family moved to the Tomeo House from the Monarch Mine, where John's father Mike worked and was nicknamed "Mike Ross, Shaker Boss." Mike Ross, who suffered from asthma caused by his exposure to coal dust, died in 1924.

John shared his memories of the house and of the yard, where he recalls working in a big vegetable garden where his family grew "everything." Grace worked hard in the home to raise six children as a single mother. The family's monthly rent was \$7.

As a teenager, John worked after school in the Jacoe Store, which is now the primary Museum building. He recalls being paid with a roast at the end of each week.

John attended the St. Louis grade school and graduated from Louisville High School in 1939. After serving in the Navy in World War II, John Ross worked in a sheet metal business in Denver and then at Rocky Flats.

It was a pleasure to have John and Martha visit the Museum, and we will be able to use the information we learned from John's recollections for future educational tours.



*John Ross and Martha Coet Ross are pictured in front of the Tomeo House, John's childhood home, during their recent visit.*

## ***JORDINELLI HOUSE UPDATE***

The Jordinelli House and Summer Kitchen renovations have been moving along with new exterior painting being done on both buildings. In addition, all of the window frames are being repaired and painted. Work has also been done on the floors of the two porches of the house. Most recently, the south-facing porch was screened in. This summer, the City is to begin the landscaping of the property with the installation of an irrigation system. In addition, a back porch and wheelchair ramp will be added.

## MUSEUM WISH LIST

We wish to extend a special thank you to Raymond Autrey for donating a composite photo of the 1939 Louisville High School graduating class, which was an item on the Museum's wish list.

The Historical Museum would like to add to its collection the yearbooks and photographs described below. If you would be willing to donate any of the described items, please contact the Historical Museum. A reproduction of an original photograph would be acceptable. All donations to the museum, a non-profit institution, are tax deductible. Thank you for your support!

*Louisville High School Yearbooks (Cargos)*  
1954, 1961, 1964, 1965, 1968, 1969,  
1970, 1971, & 1972

*Photographs of Louisville High School's  
graduating classes*  
1954, 1955, 1956, 1958, 1960, 1961,  
1962, and 1964 through 1971

*Centaurus High School Yearbooks*  
1973 to 2000

## SHARE THE GIFT OF HISTORY

Share the gift of history by sharing the gift of membership in the Louisville Historical Society. Your gift will be the one remembered throughout the year. A yearly membership is \$15.00 for an individual, \$25.00 for a family, and \$100.00 for a business. Membership means receiving our newsletters and an invitation to our Annual Historical Society Meeting. Membership also helps to ensure the preservation of Louisville's unique history and cultural character.

Visit our web site at [museum@ci.louisville.co.us](mailto:museum@ci.louisville.co.us)/museum.htm for a membership form or call the museum at 303-665-9048. You may also write to us at Louisville Historical Museum, 749 Main Street, Louisville, Colorado, 80027. Please remember to communicate your name, address, and telephone number as well as the name, address, and telephone number of the person(s) to whom you wish to give the gift of membership. We accept cash or checks. Please make checks payable to Louisville Historical Society.

## CAROLYN CONARROE TO SPEAK AT HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEETING

The annual meeting of the Louisville Historical Society will take place Wednesday, May 18 with special speaker local author and historian Carolyn Conarroe. Carolyn, who wrote *The Louisville Story*, *Coal Mining in Colorado's Northern Field*, and *Louisville Legends: The Record as History*, will be speaking on the topic "People Made the Difference."

The event begins at 7:00 p.m. at the Louisville Center for the Arts, 801 Grant Avenue. The event is open to the public. We hope to see you there!

## MUSEUM DONATIONS

The Louisville Historical Museum has accessioned the following donations during the months of February through April. We sincerely appreciate these recent donations.

*Virginia Caranci* – identification tag of Eliseo Jacoe and photos of Frank Mangus and Herman Steinbaugh, two former mayors of Louisville

*Esther Ambrose* – letter sweater from Louisville High School and senior class photo of the Louisville High School Class of 1959 taken in Glenwood Springs

*Charles Robinson* – straight razor and case

*Jean Morgan* – household items and wheat weighing scale

*Don Ross* – items relating to the WWI and WWII military service of Joseph Ross and John Ross

*Vic Caranci* – pharmaceutical bottle with the label of Bungalow Drug, a Main Street business

*Betty Buffo* – handmade pillow cases embroidered with "W" for the Warembourg family

*Raymond Autrey* – class photo, Louisville High School Class of 1939

## MUSEUM CORNER

Bridget Bacon, Museum Coordinator

What a beautiful spring this has been for walking around downtown Louisville! Plenty of moisture and sunshine have combined to create some spectacular displays of blossoming trees and flowers. As our cover article suggests, do take some time to enjoy old-town Louisville and its historic homes and yards. We invite you to stop by the Museum as well and see what's new.

Congratulations to one of our Historical Commission members, Stuart Pritchard, on the publication of his book, *A Guide to Colorado Merchant Trade Tokens*. The book, which is a guide for collectors, includes a section on Louisville trade tokens. Stuart's article about the historical use of trade tokens in Louisville businesses appeared in the Spring 2004 Louisville Historian.

The Museum is now selling copies of Carolyn Conarroe's new book, *Louisville Legends: The Record as History*. The book is \$15, with proceeds benefiting the Historical Commission. Also, thank you to Carolyn for donating a copy of the book to the Museum itself.

Thanks also to Historical Society member Mariann Lastoka for her donation to the Museum of books that she wrote. Her cookbook *The Harney Lastoka Cookbook: A Collection of Favorite Family Recipes from the Good Old Farm Days* soon will be available for purchase at the Museum for \$18, with proceeds benefiting the Historical Commission. The cookbook contains Slovak and other recipes used by the Harney-Lastoka pioneer family of Louisville. Their farm was located at the southeast corner of South Boulder Road and Highway 42. The property is now the Harney-Lastoka Open Space and is jointly owned by the City of Louisville, the City of Lafayette, and Boulder County. If you're interested in buying the cookbook, stop by the Museum or any of the Commission's fundraising events this summer!

The Historical Commission decided at its February meeting to continue with the same officers for 2005 that it had in 2004. These positions are: Don Ross, Chairperson; Virginia Caranci, Vice-Chairperson; Diane Marino, Secretary; and Dave Ferguson, Treasurer.

Many people have been enjoying the World War II film now on DVD, *Our Boys and Girls in the Armed Forces, 1943-44*, which was filmed by L.C. Graves and shows Louisville servicemen and women when they were home on leave. Mr. Graves' son, Jim, donated the film to the Louisville Historical Society after his father passed away. We recently sent Jim Graves a complimentary copy of the DVD of his father's film. The DVD is for sale at the Museum for \$25.

Also, for those of you Louisville residents who have not yet seen this unusual film showing Louisville in the 1940s, the City is planning to show it on Channel 8 during the Memorial Day weekend (May 28-30). In addition to having historical interest, the film is a meaningful reminder of the sacrifices made by servicemen and women.

Finally, a big thank you to our Museum volunteers! Lois Kershner, who catalogs the donations to the Museum, is currently working on putting older records into our computer system. Betty Buffo helps to register donations and brings her creative talents to the Museum by working on exhibits. Thank you also to Duke Damiana, Heather Lewis, and Alice Koerner for their recent help with tours at the Museum.

## MEMORIAL DONATIONS

Donations have been made to the Museum in memory of:

Nadine Wilson Channel (1929-2005)  
Joseph Dawson (1952-2005)  
Virginia Porta Markham (1913-2005)  
Richard "Butch" Williams (1948-2005)

## ANSWERS TO HOW WELL DO YOU KNOW LOUISVILLE?

1. The Hecla Mine was located at the site of Karen's in the Country, which recently closed its doors. The mine was at the northeast corner of the intersection of South Boulder Road and Highway 42.
2. According to census records, the current population of Louisville is 9 times larger than it was in 1960.
3. The Louisville Historical Museum was established in 1986 with the opening of the Tomeo House. The Jacoe Store part of the Museum followed in 1990. The Museum will be celebrating its 20th birthday next year.

### LOUISVILLE HISTORICAL COMMISSION

Sally Burlingame  
Elle Cabbage  
Virginia Caranci  
Robert Enrietto  
David Ferguson  
Donna Hauswald  
Alice Koerner  
Diane Marino  
Daniel Mellish  
Stuart Pritchard  
Donald Ross  
Patricia Seader  
Aline Steinbaugh  
William Unrau



## THANKS TO NEW AND RENEWING MEMBERS

### Renewing Members:

Patricia Lester  
Jack Bowes  
Betty Lee  
Michael Koertje  
Carol Koch Johnston  
Evelyn Harr

### New Members:

The Lodge at Balfour  
David and Marilyn Scherer  
Mariann Lastoka  
Christy Hardin

### Regrets

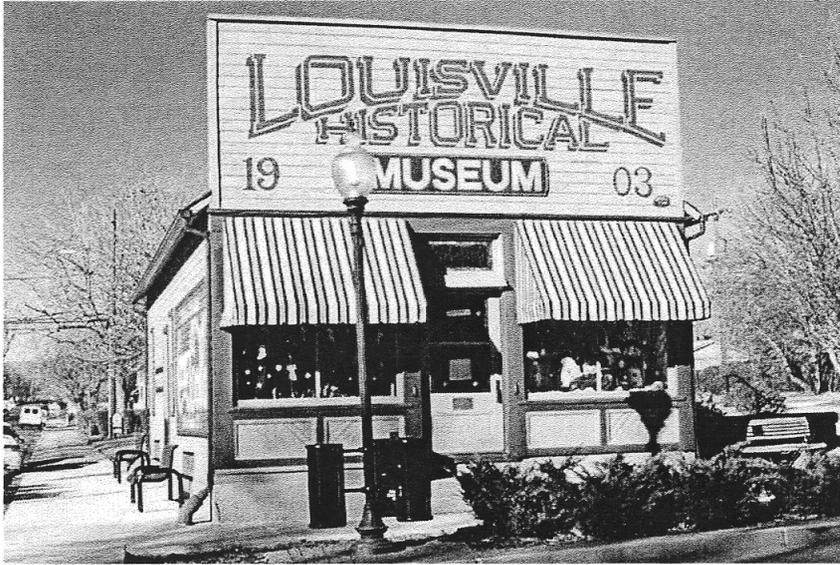
With regret, we note the deaths of two Historical Society members.

*Ruth Affolter Babcock* passed away on March 9 at the age of 98. Ruth grew up in Louisville. Her father, Edward Affolter, represented Boulder County in the state legislature from 1913-17 and as a Colorado State Senator from 1933-37 and was Louisville's City Attorney for 24 years. His offices were at Main and Pine Street, in the back of the building that is now the Huckleberry Restaurant. Ruth supplied information for an article about her father that was published in the Fall 2001 issue of the Louisville Historian.

Historical Society member and lifelong Louisville resident *Marion Tesone DiGiacomo* passed away on May 6 at the age of 94. Last summer, she was the oldest attendee at a family reunion of about 250 descendants of the four Martella sisters who emigrated from Italy to the United States. Marion's daughter, Pat Seader, is a member of the Louisville Historical Commission.

We extend our sincere sympathy to the families of Ruth Babcock and Marion DiGiacomo.

*Louisville Historical Museum*  
*1001 Main Street - 303.665.9048*  
*www.ci.louisville.co.us/museum.htm*



Open Tuesdays, Wednesdays,  
Thursdays &  
the first Saturday of every month  
10:00 AM – 3:00 PM  
Group tours available.  
*Free Admission*

*Louisville Historical Society*  
*749 Main Street*  
*Louisville CO 80027*