

The Louisville Historian

Issue #67

A Publication of the Louisville Historical Commission and Society

Summer 2005

HOMES BY SEARS: LOUISVILLE'S MAIL-ORDER LEGACY

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Historic Preservation Commission

The year was 1908. A bottle of Coca-Cola cost 5 cents, and a modern, well-proportioned two-story home could be delivered by rail to the Louisville depot for \$1,000, assuming that you had the fortitude to assemble its 30,000 parts.

No company capitalized on the American Dream as effectively as Sears, Roebuck, and Company. In the early part of the twentieth century, a Sears catalog was a fixture in every almost every home. Families could order everything from underwear to coal furnaces. But Sears made its biggest imprint on American society by offering building supplies, and by introducing the *Catalog of Modern Homes*, which was available from 1908 until 1940.

Sears' mail-order homes were brilliantly conceived, from concept to packaging. The most compelling marketing scheme was the "Already Cut" lumber, which eliminated the need for saws, thus dramatically reducing the labor required to construct the homes. The homes were carefully designed to fit into either one or two rail cars, and arrived with a complete 75 page instruction book that keyed to each numbered part.

By offering easier and more affordable ways to build homes, Sears appealed directly to the deepest desires of a growing and optimistic society, and simultaneously built an army of lifetime consumers. The legacy left by Sears, Roebuck, and Company can still be seen in Louisville today.

While the majority of Sears homes were sent to the Midwest or Northeast, many factors in Louisville's history make it a likely place to find mail-order homes. The most obvious is the convenient rail line. Sears homes invariably arrived by rail, and Louisville's commerce centered on the rail line. In addition, Louisville was growing during the 1920s, the same time that Sears was most successful with its *Catalog of Modern Homes*. Most importantly, economic factors such as modest incomes, a pool of men looking for summer employment, and a dearth of architects fostered the appeal of

affordable, build-it-yourself homes.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that Louisville has at least two Sears catalog homes, and possibly many more. However, many experts caution that it is notoriously difficult to identify a Sears home. There are several reasons for this. First, Sears homes were built to mimic popular designs of the times. Therefore, many homes *look* like Sears homes. Secondly, so many Sears homes were ordered with custom features such as different dimensions and mirrored floor plans, so it is difficult to use plan books as a guide. Finally, it is almost impossible to find a Sears home that has not been altered over the years.

The house at the southwest corner of Pine Street and Garfield Avenue is Louisville's clearest example of a Sears kit home. The Clark family lived in the home for many years. A neighbor remembers Bill Clark saying that he purchased the home from Sears for \$800! Although the front of the house has been altered over the years, its beautiful front door is characteristic of doors from the Sears catalog.

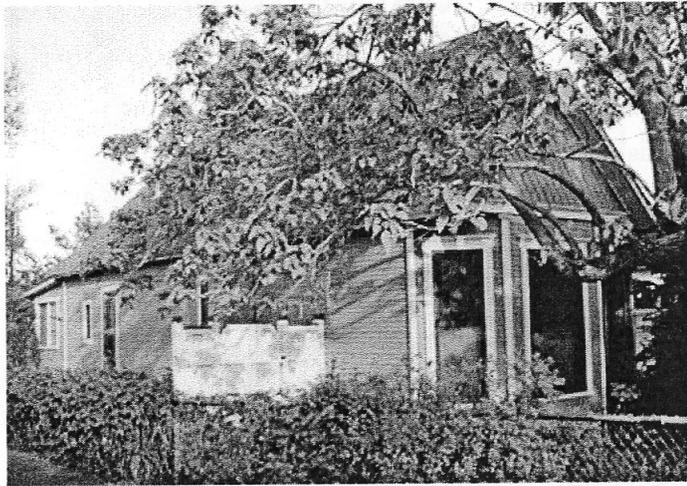


The Clark House at Pine Street and Garfield Avenue is known to have been a Sears home based on reports from many local residents.

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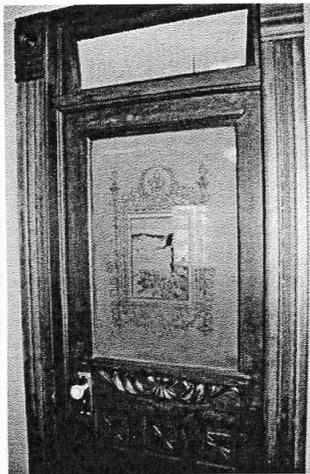
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The Petrelli-DelPizzo House at 1016 Main Street, which was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1986, is also widely believed to be a Sears kit home. It too has a characteristic front door, as well as careful proportions and detailing.



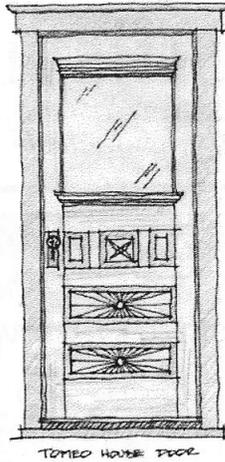
Maureen Ivy and Jay Berger, owners of the Petrelli-Del-Pizzo House on Main Street, were told by previous owners that the house originally came from Sears.

While entire kit homes may be rare, the Sears catalog was a valuable source of building supplies for Louisville families. Through the Sears catalog, homeowners could order doors and windows, millwork, hardware, fixtures, and even furniture, often at prices well below what it would cost to produce these items locally.



This interior door from a home on Garfield matches wood doors and frosted glass panels that were available from Sears catalog.

At the Louisville Historical Museum, the Tomeo House and the Jordinelli House both have front



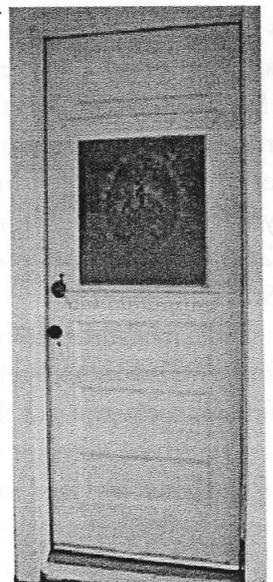
This drawing of the front door of the Tomeo House clearly shows the starburst pattern typical of many doors purchased from the Sears Catalog.

doors with designs characteristic of doors sold in the Sears catalog.

Unlike the products sold by today's corporate megaliths, the kit homes and building materials sold by Sears were of superior quality, and have lasted well throughout the years. Sears might still be in

the business of selling homes and building supplies if it were not for the stock market crash of 1929. Because the company also offered home mortgages, it was forced to foreclose on a vast number of homes. This signaled the beginning of the end for the Modern Homes department, and by 1940, it had closed its doors forever.

For Louisville, the tapestry of houses built in the 1910s and 1920s still defines our collective identity. Take a moment to walk through town and appreciate the houses and their doors, windows, porches, columns, and moldings. Once you know where to look, you will see the enduring footprints left by Sears, Roebuck, and Company.



This door of the Jordinelli House has a lovely frosted glass window and other characteristics of doors that could be ordered from the Sears Catalog.

Tips for Identifying Sears kit homes from *The Houses that Sears Built* by Rosemary Thornton

★ **Time period.** Sears kit homes were sold between 1908 and 1940.

★ **Stamped lumber.** Look at exposed lumber in your attic or basement to find the characteristic ink stamps that were placed near the ends of each piece of lumber. Sears homes sold prior to 1920 do not have stamped lumber.

★ **Shipping labels, millwork stamps, and paperwork.** Look for labels noting Sears, Roebuck & Co. These

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can often be found under stairs or behind moldings. Plumbing fixtures were stamped on the underside with the notation "SR". Look for "Norwood Sash & Door" stamps on the back sides of cabinets. These indicate that the cabinets came from Sears' millwork supplier. Finally, search the attic for shipping paperwork and blueprints.

★ **Goodwall Sheet Plaster.** Sears, Roebuck & Company advanced the science of wall plastering techniques by selling Goodwall Sheet Plaster, which was an early form of drywall. If you find Goodwall Sheet Plaster during a home remodel, it is probable that you have a Sears home.

★ **Books and County records.** The resources listed at the end of the article can be helpful in learning about and identifying Sears homes.

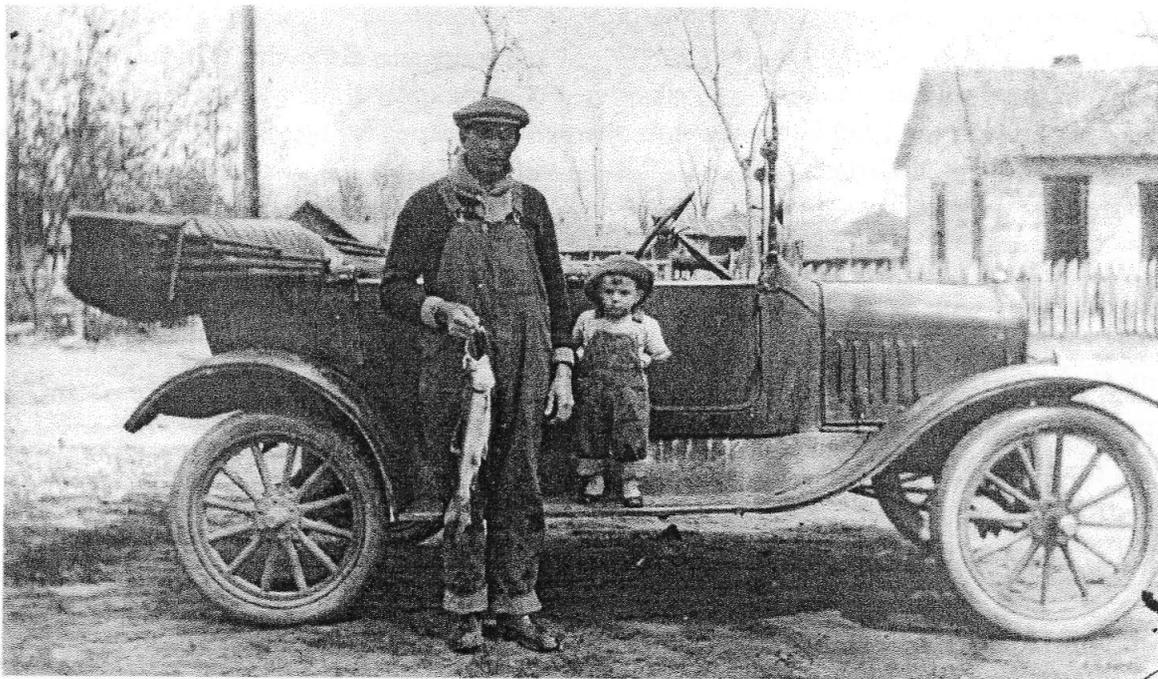
★ **Word of mouth.** Many long-time residents of Louisville know the history of various homes. Ask your neighbors if they know about the history of your home.

If you believe you own a Sears home, please let the Louisville Historical Museum know for its records.

Bibliography

- Stevenson, Katherine Cole, and Jandl, H. Ward. *Houses By Mail* New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1986.
- Thornton, Rosemary. *The Houses that Sears Built* Illinois: Gentle Beam, 2004.
- Thornton, Rosemary. *Finding the Houses that Sears Built* Illinois: Gentle Beam, 2004.
- Sears, Roebuck & Company. *Sears, Roebuck Home Builder's Catalog: The Complete Illustrated 1910 Edition* New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1990.
- Sears, Roebuck & Company. *Small Houses of the Twenties: The Sears, Roebuck 1926 House Catalog* New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1991.
- Appraisal Cards on file at the Carnegie Branch Library for Local History in Boulder (these help with comparing photos and dimensions to plan books)
- Louisville, Colorado National Register of Historic Places Survey, 1985
- Sears Archives online at www.searsarchives.com

Heather Lewis is a principal at Animal Arts/Gates Hafen Cochrane, an architecture firm in Boulder and is a Louisville resident.



Carlo Damiana and son return from a fishing trip, circa 1922.

This and other historical photos are available for review and purchase at the Historical Museum.

RESEARCHING OLD LOUISVILLE ADDRESSES

Bridget Bacon, Museum Coordinator

Many people researching old homes in Louisville don't know that the address numbers changed in the late 1930s. For example, here at the Historical Museum, the old address of the Jacoe Store was 510 Main Street and today it is 1001 Main Street. Unfortunately, there is no exact formula that can be used in all cases to convert the old numbering system to the current one. Often, however, various research sources can be used to figure out this information.

It used to be that houses in Louisville were not identified by numbers at all. For example, the 1904 Directory lists Vincent and Katy Dominico as residing at "Lafarge btw Spruce & Walnut." For much of Louisville's history, there was no home delivery of mail, so address numbers were not needed. Residents picked up their mail at the Post Office.

By the time of Louisville's 1916 Directory, properties were being listed with address numbers that remained the same until the late 1930s. At some point between 1936 and 1940, the numbers were changed. In my experience doing research, many odd address numbers were changed to even numbers and vice versa. On Louisville's north-south streets, the new numbers reflect a mathematical increase of approximately 500 over the previous numbers.

Recently, a couple visited the Museum from out of state to find out where the man's mother, Mary Monson, had lived in Louisville around 1930. He knew that she had been a business teacher at Louisville High School. We found her listed in the 1930 Louisville Directory with the address of 324 Garfield Ave. and

the occupation of "tchr High Sch," but since she had moved away by 1940, there was no listing of her name with the property's new address.

Using the Museum's old residential directories to look for other people who resided at 324 Garfield, I found that several women high school teachers lived at that address, and it appeared to be near the old High School at Garfield and Walnut, which had the address of 333 Garfield. I found the name of one woman who lived in the house who was not identified as a teacher, and I thought that she might have been the owner of the house.

With this information, I next used Boulder County's online property records and assessor's records as well as the Museum's 1909 map of Louisville to find the property's legal description and then link it to the current address of 823 Garfield Ave. This address also follows the loose formula that we have to work with, because 823 is approximately 500 more than 324 and the address changed from an even number to an odd number.

Our Museum visitors left to go look at the house where Mary Monson likely lived at 823 Garfield, which turned out to be a big two-story house almost exactly across the street from where the old High School stood – perfect for renting rooms to single high school teachers.

Not every research story ends in success, but there are many resources at the Museum and online to help answer questions relating to Louisville's different systems of house addresses.

HOW WELL DO YOU KNOW LOUISVILLE?

1. What significant event in Louisville's history occurred exactly fifty years ago this year?
2. In front of the old Town Hall on the west side of Main Street, there used to be a stone monument listing the men who served in World War I from the Louisville area. Where is that monument now?
3. What and where was the building pictured to the right?

Answers listed on page 7.



MUSEUM WISH LIST

We wish to extend a special thank you to Cliff DelForge for donating a composite photo of the 1956 Louisville High School graduating class, which was an item on the Museum's wish list. The Louisville Historical Museum would like to add to its collection the items described below. If you would be willing to donate any of the described items, please contact the 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!

- ✓ Two wooden tables; please see the "Museum Corner" for descriptions
- ✓ A miner's lunch pail for use by the Historical Commission for collecting cash donations at public events
- ✓ Louisville High School Yearbooks (Cargos): 1954, 1961, 1964, 1965, 1968, 1969, 1970, 1971, & 1972
- ✓ Photographs of Louisville High School's graduating classes: 1954, 1955, 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/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.

UPDATE ON THE JORDINELLI HOUSE RENOVATIONS

The Summer Kitchen chimney has been repaired, screens have been put on its windows, a door to the building has been hung, and a sidewalk to the Summer Kitchen has been put in. At the Jordinelli House itself, the kitchen has been cleaned and the kitchen cabinets have been prepared for storing artifacts from the Museum's collection. Attractive wooden steps to the south-facing porch have been installed along with wood-handrails. Currently, work is progressing on building a deck and ramp for handicap access on the north side of the Jordinelli House and on creating storage facilities for collection items in one room of the house.

HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEETING A SUCCESS

Local author and historian Carolyn Conarroe spoke before a crowd at the Historical Society's annual meeting on May 18. Her topic, "People Made the Difference," was premised on the idea that what Louisville is today is due to decisions made by its residents in the past. Emphasizing "everyday history," she discussed such things as the beginnings of Louisville schools, the origins of the Louisville Public Library, and the influence of the Saturday Study Club, a women's organization, on the cultural development of the town. Appropriately, the event took place at the beautiful Louisville Center for the Arts, which had its start as a grade school over one hundred years ago. Thank you to Carolyn for such an informative and enjoyable evening!



Former City Hall and Fire Station, circa 1940.

MUSEUM CORNER

Bridget Bacon, Museum Coordinator

What great news to find out that *Money Magazine* named Louisville as the fifth best place to live in the U.S.! Our own Historical Museum was even shown on a segment on NBC's *Today Show* along with an image of the State Mercantile Building on Main Street. Based on the *Money Magazine* article and statements by the magazine's spokesman, features that contributed to this distinction included Louisville's historic downtown, its tradition of community festivals, and its long history of involvement by residents in the community. Those of us who support Louisville's historical community and its downtown businesses should be especially proud of this external recognition, even though we've known all along that we live in a special place.

Historic photos of Louisville will soon be hanging in our nation's capital. Congressman Mark Udall's office in Washington, D.C. recently contacted the Museum to see if we could provide prints of historic photos for displaying there. We were happy to do so and sent four photos showing different aspects of Louisville history.

It's always enjoyable when former Louisville residents visit from out-of-town and stop by the Museum. Recently, the Museum was paid a visit by Joan Meinecke Kostick of Lakewood, whose grandparents, the Weirs, lived on Main Street. She recalled her family's story that during the gunfire of the miners' strike of 1914, her grandfather called to his family to "Run, run, run!" and a bullet became lodged in the drawer of her family's sewing machine.

Another treat was a visit by Ada Bottinelli of Longmont. She emigrated from Rome, Italy as a teenager in 1927 to join her parents in Louisville. She said that she had never seen houses made out of wood until she came here. Her father, John Pellillo, had a shoe repair shop at the property now occupied by the Historical Museum.

We are in need of two wood tables at the Historical Museum. The first would be used as a research table and ideally would be approximately 3 ½ feet by 4 or 4 ½ feet in dimension. The second table would be used to display in the Summer Kitchen and should be approximately 2 ½ feet by 3 ½ feet in dimension. Preferably, this would be an older table of the type that would have been used in a summer kitchen. Please contact the Museum at 303.665.9048 if you have a table that you would consider donating for one of these purposes!

The Louisville Historical Commission was active during both the Taste of Louisville and the Fourth of July celebration, selling historical books, DVDs, photographs, and other items relating to Louisville's history as well as talking with residents. Look for the Commission's table and its annual Silent Auction at the upcoming Labor Day festival.

We are very fortunate here at the Museum to have many volunteers these past few months helping with different tasks, and we would not be able to serve the public as well without them! Thank you to Lois Kershner for her weekly cataloging; Betty Buffo for helping with exhibits and many other aspects of the Museum; and Heather Lewis for her historical research and, most recently, her contribution as the author of the article on Sears Homes in this issue. Many thanks go as well to others for helping with the different things we have going on at the Museum, including preparations for the Jordinelli House: Duke Damiana; Howard Teague; Bill Buffo; Scott Steinbaugh; Dick DelPizzo; Ron Buffo; Don Buffo; Jeremy Ferguson; Wally Hauswald; and, of course, members of the Louisville Historical Commission. I am also grateful to the City building and maintenance staff and to Commission President Don Ross for their ongoing work to renovate and prepare the Jordinelli House. Last, welcome to our two newest volunteers, Mary Kay Knorr and Bill Cohen!

MEMORIAL DONATIONS

Donations have been made to the Museum in memory of:

Marion Tesone DiGiacomo (1911-2005)

SEEKING VOLUNTEERS

The Historical Commission is seeking volunteers who would be willing to open their homes for tours during the 2005 Holiday Home Tour.

If you are interested in letting us use your home, please call Sally Burlingame at 303.604.2345.

ANSWERS TO How Well Do You Know LOUISVILLE?

1. In 1955, the last coal mine in Louisville closed for good. This last mine was the New Crown Mine and it was located near McCaslin Boulevard and Centennial Parkway. (Source: *Coal Mining in Colorado's Northern Field* by Carolyn Conarroe.)
2. The World War I monument is now located in the Louisville Cemetery at the corner of Highway 42 and Empire Road. Its list of names is called the "World War Honor Roll" and it names 95 men who served in World War I from the Louisville area. The list indicates that five of the soldiers perished. In the film "Our Boys and Girls in the Armed Forces, 1943-44," Louisville's World War I monument appears in many scenes as it stood in front of the old Town Hall. (The film is available to buy on DVD at the Louisville Historical Museum.)
3. The photo is of the Schoolhouse Café, which was located on Main Street across from Louisville High School (now Louisville Middle School). The business included both a gas station and a café that sold hamburgers, French fries, malts, and other food. It was especially popular with high school students who at lunchtime would run across the street to the café to eat. Louisville resident John Littlejohn donated the photo, which was taken in 1949 when his grandparents, Arie and Elizabeth Hawkins, owned and operated the café. The business later became "Jensen's."

LOUISVILLE HISTORICAL COMMISSION

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Robert Enrietto	Donald Ross
David Ferguson	Patricia Seader
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THANKS TO NEW AND RENEWING MEMBERS

New Members

May Kay Knorr
Marylee Zurick
Ed Domenico
Claudine Seader
Elizabeth Otto
Eric & Elizabeth Ryterski

Renewing Members

Helen Bosko Silko

Regrets

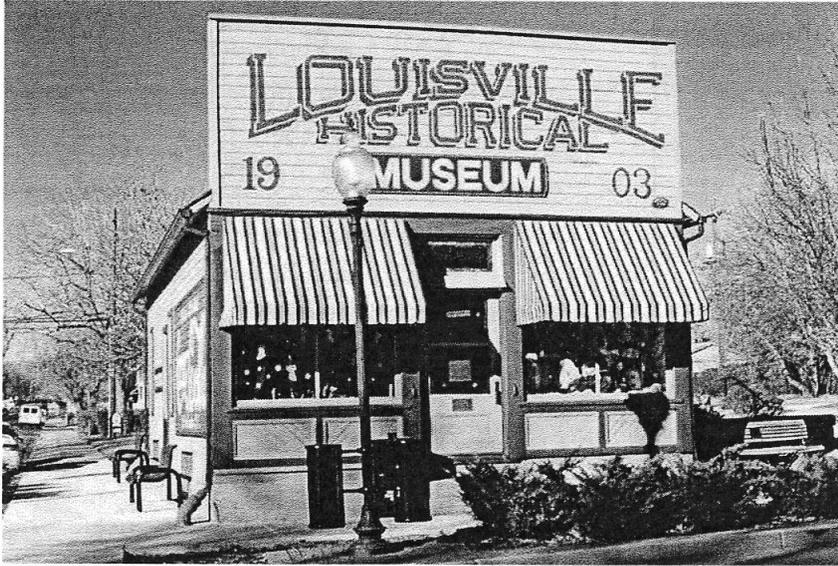
With regret, we note the recent death of a Society member. Thornton resident Henrietta Lafferty Davis passed away in May 2005. Mrs. Davis appeared in Louisville's World War II film, *Our Boys and Girls in the Armed Forces, 1943-44*. We extend our sincere sympathy to her husband, Jay Davis, and their family.

MUSEUM DONATIONS

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

- Barbara Olson* – last records of the Saturday Study Club
- Richard Elwell* – ledger from the early 1900s relating to the United Mine Workers of America
- John Littlejohn* – photos of the Schoolhouse Café
- Jean Morgan* – cast iron pot with lid
- James Lynn* – photos relating to his WWII military service
- Monarch High School* – Mosaic 2005, Volume 7, Monarch High School
- Heather Lewis* – fifteen individual photos of members of the Louisville High School Class of 1929
- Cliff DelForge* – composite class photo, Louisville High School Class of 1956 (this was on the Museum's wish list)
- Ed Domenico* – 1948 photo of the St. Louis School football team
- Robert Enrietto* – American flag with 46 stars and Louisville High School yearbooks for 1944 and 1945
- Darrel & Ingrid Sartin* – breathing apparatus for use in mine rescues

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
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Louisville Historical Society
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