

The Louisville Historian

Issue #61

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A COAL MINER'S SON

Dave Ferguson

Louisville Historical Commission Member

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I descend from a long line of coal miners. My ancestors in Scotland mined coal for who knows how long ago. My great-grandfather, James Ferguson, started mining coal in Scotland, then in Illinois, and finally came here to Louisville where he completed his career of 50 years. My grandfather Robert put in 65 years as a coal miner, starting out in Illinois and finishing in Louisville. My dad, William "Bill" worked 54 years in the mining industry. My grandfather Joe Dionigi and his three sons put in 10-30 years each.

My wife, Dot, comes from a similar lineage. Frank LaSalle, my father-in-law, mined for 35 years, starting at age 10. Frank worked construction, then at Rocky Flats when the mines closed for good. Mary LaSalle, my mother-in-law, saw her mother die from hardships created by the Ludlow massacre. Her family was forced to seek hiding when the shooting started. Mary's mom took her and four siblings into hiding along a nearby stream. It was very cold out and Mary's mom just had a new baby. She contracted pneumonia and died leaving Mary to raise her four siblings, including the newborn baby. She was ten years old at the time.

Robert Ferguson started mining coal at the ripe old age of ten. He was forced to retire at the age of 75. He was the operating engineer and ran the cages and other equipment that raised and lowered miners and coal wherever and whenever needed. Robert was famous for working 7 double shifts (eight hours each) in a row, eating and sleeping in the engineer's room when he had the time. His three favorite people were Josephine Roach, John L. Lewis, and Franklin D. Roosevelt.

My dad, Bill Ferguson, started mining coal when he was seventeen and retired 57 years later at the age of 74. He started out driving a mule and after years of hard work and studying, he became President of Clayton Coal Company. Bill sustained several critical injuries as a miner. He was blinded in his right eye when a stray piece of steel lodged in his eye. He had part of a finger cut off at an angle, and was covered up in a cave in at the Columbine Mine. He suffered a broken femur and was in traction at St. Luke's hospital for over 100 days. One miner was

killed and another suffered a broken back. This accident occurred on my wife's 18th birthday. As soon as Bill was able, which was two years after the accident, he went back to work and mined for another twenty years.

I was born in the house at 1100 Jefferson Avenue on December 10, 1928. When my mother was physically able, we moved to the Grant Mine in Frederick, Colorado. Having the newest baby in camp, my mom had plenty of help and babysitters. We stayed in Frederick until I was old enough to go to school.

Dave Kerr (a former Louisville mayor) was the Grant Mine's superintendent. He often took me for rides when the trains would come into camp to switch the coal cars. He would take me up into the cab of the engine and we would ride until the trains finished switching coal cars. This was a routine we often repeated. I was named after him, and I called him and his wife "Aunt & Uncle" until they died.

Next we moved to the New Morrison Mine near Erie. The houses here were a lot nicer, but there were only 6-8 houses for key personnel. My dad was the mine foreman. He was highly trained in mine safety and first aid. When the Monarch Mine exploded, he was called in on the rescue and we did not see him for three days. My father-in-law, Frank LaSalle, was on the cage getting ready to descend to work when the explosion occurred. He was one of the first on a rescue team who helped remove both the survivors and the dead.

The next year, my dad was transferred to the Monarch Mine. My folks rented a house on the 1200 block of Main Street from Jim Colacci. I attended Louisville Elementary School, which was then located at Memory Square, for third grade.

When I was in grades four and five, my dad was transferred to the Puritan Mine near Erie. This was more of a typical mining camp. Almost all of the workers lived in the camp, which was segregated into three parts. There were two blocks in the main part

Continued on page 2

Continued from page 1

with houses on either side of the street. Each was a clone of the other. Bosses and key personnel occupied this area.

The west end of the camp had many more of the same style houses, where Mexican Americans, Scandinavians, Northern, Middle and Southern Europeans, and all kinds of other nationalities lived. There weren't any Black Americans there. I don't think any blacks worked in the mines of this area. They worked in the mines in the Route County area.

The eastern section of the camp contained Mexican Nationals only. Most of these people could not speak any English. At night and on the weekends, no one but the Nationals was allowed into this area. There were many drunks and fights, and this was known to be an unsafe area. The police did not patrol this area, so people traveled through the area at their own risk.

Life at the coal camp was difficult. Almost all of the homes had two bedrooms with a small living room and a kitchen. A heating stove heated the front two rooms and the kitchen stove heated the rest. All cooking and baking was done on the kitchen stove, which only burned coal or wood. The houses had screened back porches that many larger families turned into extra bedrooms. Each had a dirt basement, a one-car garage, and an outhouse with three different sized potties: mama, papa, and baby. Coalhouses for coal and wood storage were attached. There was one light in each room. Refrigeration was accomplished with an icebox filled with ice, because the iceman only delivered ice twice each week. Much of the food spoiled in the summertime.

There was no running water. Water was hauled in from wells 3-5 miles away. This was a weekly family excursion. Much of the food was purchased from local farmers. There was a company store where miners charged food and clothing in the summertime when the mines were shut down. Almost everyone lived off of unemployment- \$15 a week per family. No food stamps or free lunches were available for the unemployed miners.

We had bussing and segregation long before Martin Luther King, Jr. We were "White Americans." We were mostly all bussed to Erie for grades 1-12. The older kids sat in the front of the bus and the younger kids sat in the back of the bus. The older ones were first on and first off, and they had the privilege of sitting near the heater during the winter. We were served daily hot lunches provided by the government. We ate in our classrooms and stayed together at all

times. Corporal punishment was allowed, and swats on the behind were very common. If you got one at school, you would get one at home if your parents found out.

We didn't have any leagues, recreation centers or swimming pools. We organized our own games that we played at night or on the weekend. We played football, basketball and baseball. Our swimming was done in irrigation ditches, ponds, and local lakes. In the evenings, we would often play kick the can, roll the ball, and many other games we made up.

Our mode of transportation was the bicycle, if your family could afford one. We all dressed very similarly in bib overalls and shirts. The girls wore dresses. No shorts or slacks were allowed in school. We didn't have TV, McDonalds, RTD, or local fire and police protection. We all took care of each other.

In 1937, my grandmother died and my folks remodeled the house at 1124 Lincoln Avenue. My grandfather, Robert Ferguson, originally built this house in 1904. There has been a Ferguson living in this house for nearly 100 years. Oddly enough, the house to the north has been occupied by a Hawkins-Martella for the same number of years. The house at 1124 Lincoln Avenue was the only house my parents owned during their 70 years of married life.

When we moved into this house, we had both indoor and outdoor bathrooms, but my mom made everyone use the outdoor plumbing. This was the first time in my life that we had refrigeration, hot and cold running water, and a furnace to heat the house. We still had a wood-burning kitchen stove for cooking. Eventually, Louisville put in a sewage system, and the outhouses were gone for good. Amen!!

Growing up in Louisville in the 30's and 40's was an experience in itself. Jobs were hard to come by. Mining was the thing to do. Most of the miners were laid off in the summer months, and worked hard during the winter to pay off the debts created during the summer months. We were all poor growing up, but we didn't know any different because almost everyone else was in the same boat.

We formed our own sports teams, the North against the South. Pine Street was our Mason-Dixon Line that divided the town into the two sports areas. At night, we played games that were similar to games that were played all over, including the coal camps. We hunted and fished and sold our catches for money or ate them for supper at home. There was an 8 PM curfew for everyone under 16 years old. You had to be in your neighborhood by then or you would be in trouble.

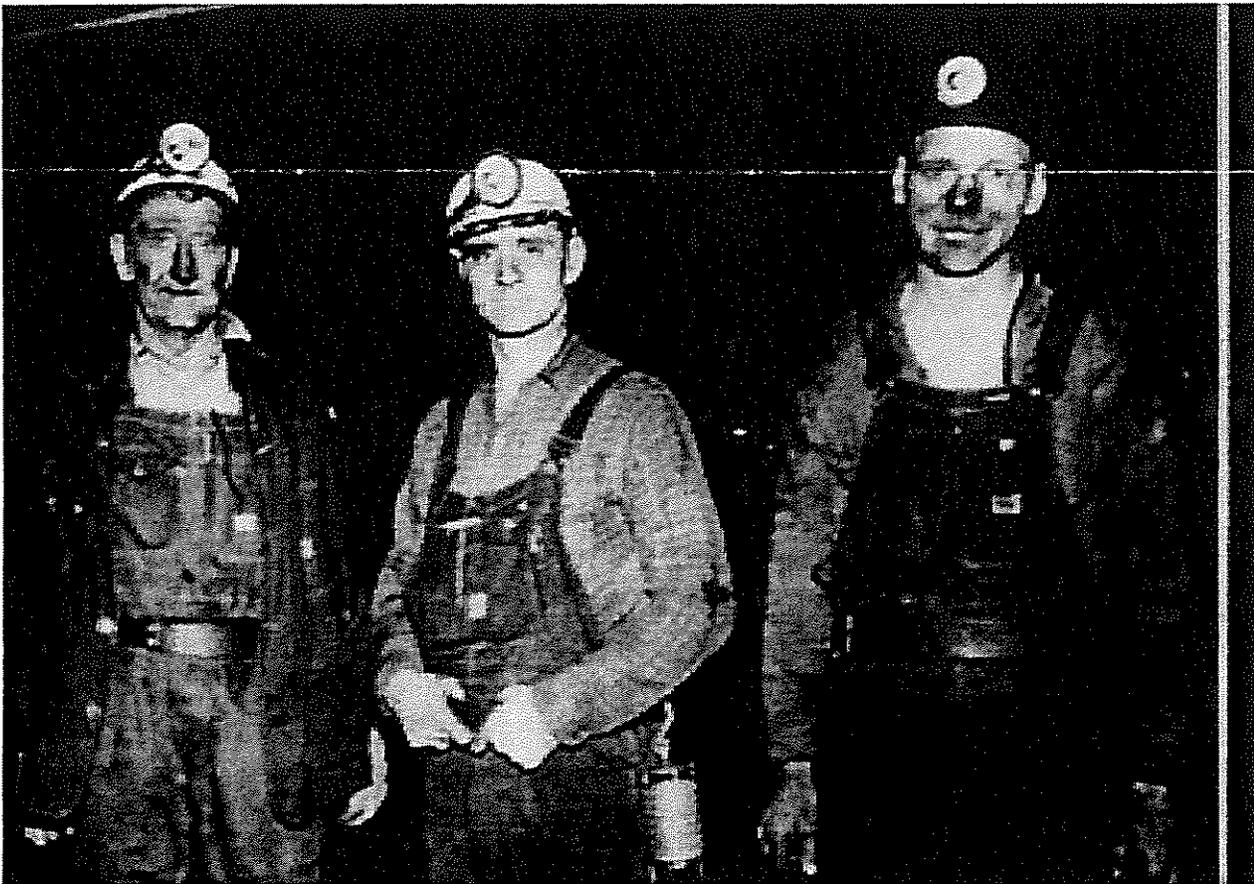
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My first job was cleaning out chicken coops for Louie Dagastino. This was a dirty, dusty, smelly job, but it made me some spending money. I dusted seats in the Rex theatre (where Senor T's is now). There was no pay involved, but I was allowed to watch the show for free anytime I wanted. We collected junk and sold it to the junk collector for small profits. He was a crooked man, but we were able to out smart him even as kids.

Dick Franchini's dad let us use his old farm truck to clean ash pits, haul red ash and manure for profit. We had a very lucrative business for several years during the war. When Dick joined the Navy, Don Ross and I teamed up and kept the business rolling. After a good days work, we would go to the Hiway Mine to shower. This was always a treat. I also drove a delivery truck for Jacoe's Grocery Store (this is now the museum) my last two years in high school. My wife also worked at Jacoe's Grocery.

World War II changed Louisville as well as the world forever. Grandmothers, mothers, daughters, sisters and wives were all working in war plants in and around Denver. We worked construction at these plants, too during the summer. When I graduated from high school, I joined the Marine Corps. This was typical for many youth in the area.

My dad took me down in the mines with him from the time I was able to walk and keep up with him until I returned from the military. Every time I went down the mine, I was afraid. Every little noise made me jump. My dad let me spend one eight-hour shift down in the Lincoln Mine to see how it was done. I think he did this to discourage me from wanting to be a coal miner. It worked. The family tradition of coal mining stopped when it was my turn. I chose otherwise, and became a teacher and I have absolutely no regrets.



Industrial Mine, Superior, CO 1941 - Standing left to right are Dave Kerr, Superintendent for Rocky Mountain Fuel Company, Al Kisner, section foreman from West Virginia, and Gerald Thorne, pit boss from Superior. Note the safety lamp on the belt of Al Kisner.

2003 HOLIDAY HOME TOUR A SUCCESS

Elle Cabbage

Louisville Historical Commission Member

THE 2003 HOLIDAY PARADE OF HOMES was held on Saturday, December 6, 2003, from 10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m. We were joined by over 200 people. This event has become an annual fundraiser for the Louisville Historical Commission and specifically raises funds for the renovation of the Jordinelli House. This year the Holiday Parade of Homes raised over \$1,700.

We are most thankful to Sue Sherman, Sarah and Lenny Martinelli, Jan Rowen and John Leary, Terry and Gerry Staffel, and Catherine Able and Walden Miller for opening their homes to the public for another successful event.

In addition to our generous home owners, we would like to express our gratitude to the historic Louisville United Methodist Church. The church and its members opened their doors, assisting the Holiday Boutique participates with space, tables, and chairs, in addition to providing complimentary Christmas cookies and beverages throughout the day!

We would like to extend thanks to Judy Barkley, Jeanne Dondelinger, Karen Squire, Ruth Warkenton, Jim Trout, Lisa Capano, and Gine Wagner for serving as hosts and hostess at the homes on the tour.

In addition, much appreciation is extended to Sally Burlingame for her initial vision of the Holiday Parade of Homes and her continued commitment to the success of this marvelous event. Many thanks to Ed Yeager and Centennial Printing for supporting this event by donating the printing for all materials. Also, thanks to the Louisville Chamber of Commerce for including the Holiday Parade of Homes in its seasonal advertising.

The Holiday Parade of Homes is becoming, not only a fundraiser, but also a Louisville tradition that kicks off the holiday season with good will. It fills the streets and homes with the warmth and cheer of our community and our residents, and also teaches us all more about our historic downtown and its homes!

We are very appreciative to all those individuals participating this year and encourage you to contact the museum if you would like to be a part of this annual event in 2004!

UPDATE ON the Jordinelli House Renovations

Bob Enrietto

Louisville Historical Commission Member

The sidewalks for the museum site will be completed this summer as a part of the City's concrete program. Work will begin this Spring or Summer scheduled to start in May.

We are working toward completion of all electrical installations by the end of February, and completion of all drywall repairs at the same time. The removal of the partial wall in the hallway is still being considered as to the type of material to use for the replacement beam. It should be complete in about four weeks.

With the City's reroofing of both the Miner's House and the Museum, the roofing repair program is complete. In addition, the City has begun the bid process to work on new siding for the north side of the house.

The Holiday Home Tour raised additional funds for the Jordinelli Renovation Account. Balance as of January 14th was \$7,399.19.

The Commission thanks everyone for their generosity towards this project.

DONATIONS

The Louisville Historical Museum has received the following donations during the months of November through January. We sincerely appreciate these recent donations.

Marena Gleeson - Early 1900s dresses, petticoats, & camisoles

Don Ross - Photographic prints of Joe's Italian Market & the home of Joe and Rose D'Amato

Glenn Steinbaugh - Cement sacks from Steinbaugh's Hardware & Lumber Co., early 1900s hammer & tobacco tin, & a 1930s tube of Wild Root hairdressing

Emily Gerich - Carbide lamp supply can

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 means helping to ensure the preservation of Louisville's unique history and cultural character.

Need a membership form? Visit our web site at museum@ci.louisville.co.us/museum.htm 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. Thank you.

Louisville Historical Commission Members

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

MUSEUM WISH LIST

The Louisville 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 Louisville Historical Museum and let us know. 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, 1966, 1968, 1969, 1970, 1971, & 1972
- Photographs of Louisville High School's graduating classes - 1939, 1953, 1954, 1955, 1956, 1958, 1960, 1961, 1962, and 1964 through 1971



THE MUSEUM CORNER

*Carol Gleeson
Museum Coordinator*

Happy 2004! The year 2004 promises to be a busy and productive year at the Louisville Historical Museum. Many hands are working together to renovate the Jordinelli House, maintain existing buildings, expand Museum services, and improve conservation procedures. Through the efforts of Museum staff, City of Louisville employees, Historical Commission members, and volunteers, the Louisville Historical Museum continues to meet its mission to collect, preserve, and interpret the diverse history of Louisville. I invite you to share in our accomplishments by visiting the Museum or our website at www.ci.louisville.co.us/museum.htm.

Many walk-in visitors and scheduled tour groups share in our accomplishments by touring our exhibits, perusing our historic photograph collection, and researching family members. Recently, the Superior Historical Commission utilized our service of reproducing photographs by ordering seven photographic prints and thirteen digitized photographs to be used in an upcoming book titled, "The Lost Superior." The Superior Historical Commission hopes to publish this book by the month of June. The Louisville Historical Museum is proud to be a part of this new book.

The Louisville Historical Commission is expanding their efforts and their number of members. As of January 2004, the Commission has three new members. The new members are Sally Burlingame, Daniel Mellish, and Stuart

Pritchard. With a total of fourteen members, the Commission will strive to meet its mission to promote public awareness of the history of Louisville and to solicit public and private support for historical projects like the renovation of the Jordinelli House.

The Louisville Historical Commission selected Donald Ross to be the 2004 recipient of the Pioneer Award. Donald Ross is presently the chairperson of the Commission. Virginia Caranci, vice chairperson of the Commission, presented the Pioneer Award to Donald Ross at the Chamber of Commerce Awards Banquet on January 21, 2004. You may read Virginia's presentation in the newsletter's article titled, "2004 Pioneer Award."

Once again, I would like to extend my appreciation to the volunteers who share their time and talents to preserve and interpret Louisville's history. The Museum's success and growth is largely dependent on the efforts of the volunteer staff members. Thank you!

LOUISVILLE HISTORICAL MUSEUM
1001 MAIN STREET
LOUISVILLE CO 80027
HOURS:

TUESDAY, WEDNESDAY, THURSDAY & THE FIRST
SATURDAY OF EVERY MONTH
10:00 AM - 3:00 PM
museum@ci.louisville.co.us
www.ci.louisville.co.us/museum.htm

THANKS TO NEW AND RENEWING MEMBERS!

Renewing Members

Jack Bowes
Gail Khasawneh
Dominic & Rita Ferrera
Beulah Caldwell
June Enrietto
Bridget Bacon
Clara Jo & Jerald Zarret
Carol Koch Johnston
Palmena DiCarlo

New Members

Wendell Hunt
Robert DiGiallonardo
Alex & Erin Robertson

This list consists of memberships and renewals in the Louisville Historical Society during the months of November through January. We apologize for any omissions or misspellings. Please contact the museum with corrections.

2004 PIONEER AWARD

Virginia Caranci

Louisville Historical Commission Member

The Louisville Historical Commission is pleased to announce that Donald Ross is this year's recipient of the Pioneer Award. The Pioneer Award is presented annually to a person or persons who contributed to the welfare and interests of the Louisville community. On January 21, 2004 Virginia Caranci, Vice Chairperson of the Louisville Historical Commission, presented the Pioneer Award to Donald Ross at the Chamber of Commerce Awards Banquet. Virginia's presentation is printed below.

As Vice Chairperson of the Louisville Historical Commission, I am privileged to present this year's Pioneer Award. This person is truly a Louisville pioneer. He was born in Louisville on July 1, 1929 in a little house in the part of town that was then called, "Little Italy." This area of town was east of the middle school and east of the railroad tracks. His father, Pete, was a coal miner and his mother, Ella, was a housewife. He has one older sister, Betty Moreno. Our honoree attended St. Louis Catholic School from 1st through 8th grade and graduated from Louisville High School in 1947. He worked for a short time after graduation as a mechanic and was then drafted into the army for two years before being honorably discharged. He attended UNC in Greely, which was called Colorado State College of Education. He graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in 1956 and with a Master of Arts in 1959.

He taught school in New Mexico for a short time. He came back to Colorado and taught in Westminster until he retired after thirty-two years of teaching. His specialty was woodworking and drafting.

This busy person married Joyce Mullette in 1960. They have five children including four girls and one boy. He now has ten grandchildren that are his pride and joy. He spends a lot of time with them.

Our pioneer was on the City Council from 1969 to 1974, where he was instrumental in organizing water rights for the city and getting the first mobile park (Parco DelZengaro) on South Boulder Road. He was appointed to the Parks and Recreation Board in 1975 and served five years. He worked to get Miners Field in playing shape and worked with the Recreation Board on a five, ten, and fifteen-year plan for recreation and athletics in Louisville.

He served on the first recycling board and has served on the Louisville Historical Commission for nine years. He has been the chairperson of this Commission for seven years. He has been a member of the American Legion Post 111 for fifty-one years and has volunteered many hours for the post. He still volunteers every Monday at the Legion Bingo. He is a member of the Tri-City Elks Lodge and volunteers much time to St. Louis Catholic Church.

This hard working pioneer is struggling now to get the Jordinelli House Museum completed as soon as possible. He not only volunteers his time there, but works hard to get more volunteers and to raise funds for the Jordinelli House.

Although he doesn't officially work for the Chamber of Commerce, he should be an honorary member because of all of the volunteering he does at the Chamber. When you see Christmas lights go up at the Chamber, it was due to his hard work. You'll see him helping Gene to put up tents for the Taste of Louisville, cooking at the Spaghetti Open Golf Tournament, and stopping by the Chamber every morning to see what work needs to be done as he has his morning coffee.

If you'd like to meet a man who does not know the meaning of the words, "No," or "I can't do it," then I'd like to introduce him to you. It gives me great pleasure to present the 2004 Pioneer Award to a great family friend, Donald "Archie" Ross.

Louisville Historical Museum



1001 Main Street
Louisville, Colorado

303-665-9048

museum@ci.louisville.co.us

Hours:

Tuesdays, Wednesdays, & Thursdays

&

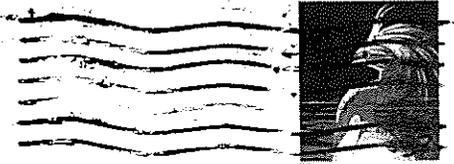
the first Saturday of every month

10:00 AM - 3:00 PM

Louisville Historical Society

749 Main Street

Louisville CO 80027



Louisville Public Library
950 Spruce Street
Louisville CO 80027

